

# **Islam**

Versus the

# **West**

*Maryam Jameela*

## Contents

S.No.	Page No.
Introductory: How I Became Interested in Islam.....	5
1. The Philosophical Sources of Western Materialism .....	11
2. A Critique of <i>Islam in Modern History</i> .....	23
3. The Enemy from Within .....	27
4. A Refutation of the Philosophy of Ziya Gokalp .....	33
5. A Refutation of the Philosophy of Taha Hussein .....	39
6. A Discussion of <i>From Here We Start</i> .....	47
7. Western Civilization Versus Islamic Civilization.....	53
8. An Analysis and a Discussion of <i>Social Justice in Islam</i> .....	59
9. Muhammad Iqbal: The Poet of Islam .....	65
10. Islam and the Modernists .....	75
11. Can Islam be Reconciled with the Spirit of the Twentieth Century?.....	81



## **Introductory:**

### **How I Became Interested in Islam**

I trace the beginning of my interest in Islam when as a child of 10, while attending a reform Jewish Sunday School, I became fascinated in the historical relationship between the Jews and the Arabs. From my Jewish textbooks I learned that Abraham was the father of the Arabs as well as the Jews. In these same books I read how centuries later when in medieval Europe, Christian persecution made their lives intolerable, the Jews were welcomed in Muslim Spain, and it was this same Arabic-Islamic civilization which stimulated Hebrew culture to reach its highest peak of achievement. At that time, completely unaware of the true nature of Zionism, I naively thought the Jews were returning to Palestine to strengthen their close ties of kinship in religion and culture with their Semitic cousins. Together, I believed, the Jews and the Arabs would cooperate and achieve another Golden Age of culture in the Middle East.

Despite my fascination with the study of Jewish history I was extremely unhappy at the Sunday School. At this time I identified myself strongly with the Jewish people and their horrible fate under the Nazis and I was shocked and pained that none of my fellow classmates took their religion seriously. For instance, during religious services at the synagogue the children would read comic strips hidden in their prayer books and make fun of the rituals. The children were so noisy and disorderly that the teachers found it almost impossible to conduct the classes. Meanwhile I delved into the stories of Jesus in the New Testament and was puzzled why so great a prophet who led such beautiful and noble life had been rejected by his own people. Perhaps my classmates' complete lack of respect for their teachers was justified. I found them narrow-minded and bigoted emphasizing their hatred and fear of Christians far more than their love for Judaism.



At home the atmosphere for religious observance was scarcely more congenial. On the Jewish High Holy Days instead of attending synagogue, I felt it blasphemous that my sister and I were taken out of school to go out on picnics and parties. When I told my parents how miserable I was at the reform Jewish Sunday school, they joined an agnostic humanistic organization known as the Ethical Culture Movement.

The Ethical Culture Movement was founded in the late nineteenth century by Felix Adler. While studying for the rabbinate, Felix Adler became convinced that devotion to ethical values as relative and man-made regarding any supernaturalism or theology as irrelevant constituted the only religion fit for the modern world. I attended the Ethical Culture School for 5 years. Here I grew into complete accord with the ideas of the movement and looked upon all traditional organized religions with scorn.

Throughout my adolescence I remained under the influence of humanistic philosophy until after graduation from secondary school when I chose to study at the university a course entitled "Judaism in Islam". My professor was a rabbi who tried to convince his students – all Jews – that Islam was derived from Judaism. Our textbook took each verse from the Qur'an, painstakingly tracing it to its allegedly Jewish sources. His lectures were liberally illustrated with films and coloured slides in praise of Zionism and the State of Israel. Although his real aim was to prove to his students the superiority of Judaism over Islam, he convinced me of just the opposite. As I plunged deeper into the study of the Old Testament and the Qur'an, the contrast between the two scriptures became increasingly evident. In a sense the Old Testament could almost be considered a history of the Jews as God's special chosen people. Although the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic to an Arab Prophet, its message is a universal one directed to the entire human race.

When my professor explained that the divine right of the Jews to Palestine has always been a central theme of Judaism, I was instantly repelled by such a narrow-minded conception of



God. Doesn't the Qur'an say that "to God belongs the East and West; wherever ye turn there is His face"? Didn't Prophet Muhammad say that the whole earth is a mosque? Zionism preaches that only in Palestine a Jew feels at home and elsewhere he is living in exile. The claim of my professor that only in Palestine could the Jews make their contribution to human civilization seemed baseless when I pondered over the fact that Moses received his revelation in Egypt; the most important parts of the *Talmud* were written in what is now Iraq, and some of the most beautiful Hebrew poetry was composed in Muslim Spain. The rigid exclusiveness of Judaism, I felt, had a great deal of connection with the persecutions the Jews suffered throughout their history. Perhaps this would never have happened if the Jews had competed vigorously with the other faiths for converts. Zionism is a combination of the racist tribalistic aspects of Judaism with modern secular nationalism. Zionism was further discredited in my eyes when I discovered that Israeli leaders such as David Ben-Gurion are not observant Jews and perhaps nowhere in the world is orthodox Judaism regarded with such contempt as in Israel! The Zionists have made the worst aspects of Western materialistic philosophy their very own. Only a complete rejection of all moral and spiritual values could account for such a systematic uprooting of an entire people from their homeland and an utter disregard of any sense of justice. When I found that nearly all important Jewish leaders supported Zionism and felt not the slightest twinge of conscience for the terrible wrong inflicted on the Arabs, I could no longer consider myself a Jew at heart.

At the same time my professor convinced me that ethical values had a divine origin and were the absolute eternal truth. I could not understand how people such as my parents could cherish moral and spiritual values and then consider their theological foundations irrelevant. If morals were purely man-made, they could be changed at will according to whim, convenience or circumstances. Belief in the hereafter, I realised, was essential not merely because it was comforting. If ethical and spiritual values are of divine origin, we are directly



responsible to God for developing our highest potentialities. Each one of us will be called upon to render an account of one's life on earth and be rewarded or punished accordingly. Therefore, one who has a firm faith in the hereafter is willing to sacrifice transitory pleasures and endure hardships to attain lasting good.

As I studied the beliefs of all the major faiths, I came to the conclusion that originally all great religions were one, but as time passed they became corrupted. Idol worship, the idea of reincarnation, and the caste system began to permeate Hinduism, passivity became characteristic of Buddhism, ancestor worship of Confucianism, the doctrine of original sin, the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus resulting in an anthropomorphic conception of God and the atonement by the death on the Cross of Christianity and the exclusively chosen people idea of Judaism. All these ideas which so repelled me are not found in Islam. Increasingly I began to feel that Islam is the original religion that alone has retained its purity. Other religions were only partially true. Only Islam contained the whole truth. Above all, Islam provided its adherents with a complete, comprehensive way of life in which the relation of the individual to society and the relation of the material to the spiritual were balanced into perfect harmony.

Although I wanted to become a Muslim, my family managed to argue me out of it. I was warned that Islam would complicate my life since the faith is not part of the American scene. I was told that Islam would alienate me from my family and isolate me from the community. At that time my faith was not sufficiently strong to withstand these pressures. I became so ill that I had to discontinue my studies. For a long time I remained at home under private medical care, steadily growing worse. In desperation my parents had me confined to a hospital, where I stayed for more than 2 years. While in the hospital I vowed that if I recovered I would become a Muslim.

After I was finally allowed to go home, discharged, I investigated all the opportunities for meeting Muslims in New York City and make the friendships, and it was my pleasure to make the acquaintance of some of the finest people that anyone could ever



hope to meet. I also began to write articles for Muslim magazines and to carry on an extensive correspondence with Muslim leaders all over the world.

As Ramadhan approached, my desire to embrace Islam grew so strong that I began to practice the five daily prayers, and am now undertaking the fast for the first time. I am doing this with a firm belief that nothing but good can result in living according to my deepest convictions.

## Chapter 1

# The Philosophical Sources of Western Materialism

Despite the obvious divergencies in details of religious doctrine and political rivalry, medieval Christian Europe and the Muslim world shared a basic heritage in common. The dominant concern of Christians and Muslims alike was their salvation in the life beyond the grave. Both Christians and Muslims were convinced that the ethical values God had revealed in the scriptures through the Prophets were absolute and eternal. Few doubted that rebellion against God's commands would result in consequences terrible beyond description. Submission to the will of God with love and joy during this earthly life was universally believed to assure the individual eternal bliss in the world to come.

The common religious values which medieval Christian Europe shared with the Muslim world were re-enforced by free cultural exchange which transcended all doctrinal controversies. Bitter warfare over Spain did not prevent thousands of Christian scholars from attending the great Muslim universities of Cordova, Seville, Granada and North Africa. Pope Sylvester II (930–1003), who was responsible for the introduction of Arabic numerals, the use of the zero as well as the decimal system into Europe, received his education at Qarawiyin. Both Muslim and Christian philosophers strived to strengthen the doctrines of their respective creeds with the logic of Aristotle. It is no coincidence that the vehemence with which St. Thomas Aquinas denounces Islam in his writings made him no less an avid student of Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazzali and Ibn Rushd. In view of this, it is not surprising why Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Ibn al-Arabi's vivid description of the Prophet's Night Journey through the seven heavens bear such striking resemblance. That St. Francis of Assisi and Ibn al-Farid, a great mystic Arab poet, could become such close personal friends



perhaps illustrates best the spiritual kinship between medieval Christian Europe and the Muslim world.

From the inception of the Renaissance onwards, the intellectual atmosphere of Europe and the Muslim world drifted further apart. With the growth of cities and an ever-expanding commerce, the church was superseded by a growing middle class as the dominant force in urban society. With the support of strong centralized monarchies, armies were raised which rebelled against the feudal nobility and seized their property. Kings, bankers and merchants replaced the church as the patrons of art and learning. When the entire emphasis had shifted to developing the potentialities of each individual here on earth to the fullest possible extent without reference to the hereafter, modern Western civilization, as we know it today, was born.

With a passionate zeal, the scholars of the Renaissance turned for inspiration to the classics of ancient Greece and Rome. As faith in the freedom of the unaided human intellect replaced faith in God, the scholars of the Renaissance found their justification in severing their spiritual ties with the church in these pagan philosophies which glorified the joys of this world. The medieval ideal of monasticism was scorned and ridiculed. Worldliness and wealth increasingly corrupted the church itself until the luxurious surroundings of some of the popes, bishops, and monks were scarcely distinguishable from the courts of secular monarchs.

The Protestant Reformation dealt the church such a crippling blow that Christianity has never recovered from it to this day. Not content to rectify the abuses of the church power, Martin Luther broke with it completely and decided to create a religion of his own. This breakup with the Roman church was not so much caused by its abuses or corruption as is popularly believed. As economic life increased in complexity and wealth, the business class of Germany grew more and more hostile to the saintly monastic ideal and the spiritual domination by Rome. Instead they glorified prosperity and success as tangible signs of God's favour condemning poverty as punishment, solitude as selfish and contemplation as idleness. The rebellion against the authority of the Pope, the elimination of the



priesthood, the sacraments, saint worship and monasticism by Martin Luther have tempted many Muslim thinkers to regard Protestantism as proof that Christianity is evolving ever closer to Islam. A more careful examination, however, will show how unjustified such optimism is. The substitution of the authority of the church for the authority of the scriptures gave every individual the license to interpret the Bible exactly as he wished, choosing and discarding what he liked according to whim, convenience and circumstances. Rejecting Latin as the universal language, Protestant leaders translated the Bible into the local vernaculars, thus subjecting it to further corruption. The rejection of the authority of the Pope and Latin language greatly strengthened the cause of secular nationalism. In all the Protestant countries a separate national church was organized under the complete control of the government until everywhere in Europe the spiritual power of religion was forced to promote the interest of secular politics.

In place of a strong united Christendom were now a multiplicity of small weak sects, each with its own narrow parochial outlook. Protestant theology regarded salvation as a pure act of faith bestowed on the individual by God, having no connection whatsoever with either his moral standards or his good works. Now that ethical values were no longer dependent upon supernatural sanction, Martin Luther's followers were now free to live as they saw fit without reference to either God or the hereafter. Protestant theology, which regarded religious faith as a purely private personal matter, resulted in its becoming a special thing apart from everyday community life. Consequently, it was not long before Protestantism became for many what is today for Sunday observance only while the remainder of the week is devoted to seeking material success and prosperity.

With the rebirth of European culture, medieval scholars eagerly investigated the scientific knowledge they found in the libraries and universities of Muslim Spain. Not only had the Muslims preserved the writings of Plato and Aristotle and salvaged the mathematical and medical knowledge of the



Hellenistic world, they built upon it by means of experimental research in the laboratory. Gerard of Cremona (1114–1187) devoted his entire life translating 92 complete scientific works from Arabic including Ibn Sina's vast Canon, which for centuries remained the supreme authority of its field in all the medical schools of Europe.

Francis Bacon epitomized the scientific spirit of the modern age in the New Atlantic. An English ship lands upon a utopian island in the remote Pacific whose chief pride is a great institution devoted to scientific research. The ruler conducts the travellers through this place, saying, "The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes and the secret motions of things and the enlarging of the bounds of the human empire to the effecting of all things possible."

Descartes carried on the development of the experimental method where Francis Bacon had begun, completely overthrowing the authority of Aristotle and the medieval scholastic philosophy. What they craved was a method for discovering new truth instead of merely proving what was already known.

There is no inherent incompatibility between scientific research and religion. Doesn't both the Bible and the Qur'an regard man as the noblest creature of God subjecting all other creatures and elements of nature for his benefit? The discovery of Muslim geographers that the earth was round instead of flat centuries before Columbus and the suspicions of many Muslim astronomers hundreds of years before Copernicus that the earth revolved about the sun never constituted the slightest threat to the survival of Islamic way of life. Because the Qur'an teaches that nature is a friend of man, Muslim scientists sought to live in harmony with it and thus felt completely at home in the universe.

The tragedy of Western science lay not in its specific discoveries which were of such tremendous benefit to the human race but rather in the dogmatic, narrow materialistic outlook of the scientists themselves. After Copernicus, the Western astronomer saw man as only a puny speck on a tiny planet revolving around a 10<sup>th</sup> rate star, drifting aimlessly in an



endless cosmic ocean. Since God, the angels and devils were not to be seen through their telescopes, they concluded that man was absolutely alone in a cold, complex cosmic machine, his creation perhaps only an accident or a mistake. Feeling like a stranger in the universe without tangible proof of any God who cherished his welfare, Western man thus abandoned as futile the search for the ultimate meaning and purpose of life and began to regard nature as he does today – as an enemy to be conquered, possessed and then manipulated by mechanical means to advance his material well-being.

To Western scientists such as Descartes, nature was nothing more than a machine which had no spiritual significance. All living beings, including man, were a mere matter of automatic chemical reactions. "Give me the elements," boasted Descartes, "and I will construct the universe!"

Intoxicated by theory advanced by Newton that the entire universe was regulated by immutably mathematical laws, the protagonists of the so-called Age of Enlightenment taught that all beliefs contrary to human experience and observation must be discarded. Miracles, prophecy, revelation as well as religious rites and ceremonies were ridiculed as superstition. Voltaire's conception of God was neither that of the Bible nor that of the Qur'an. He taught that God created the universe exactly as a watchmaker assembles a watch, afterwards having no further concern with it. Hume rejected all religious beliefs on the ground that they could not be proved either by scientific experiments or by human reason. He attacked even the Deist God of Voltaire, declaring that we have seen watches made but not worlds. If the universe did have an author, he may have been an incompetent workman or he may have long since died after completing his work, or he may have been a male or female god or a great number of gods. He may have been entirely good or entirely evil or both or neither – probably the last. Hume's argument against the existence of the hereafter ran as follows. We have no reason for concluding from a life where rewards and punishments do not coincide with human deserts that there will be any other in which they do.



Morality was regarded as a science like mathematics just as independent from theology as any other branch of human knowledge. Philosophers such as Dideroit and Rousseau agreed that utility and happiness were the only criteria for morality. They waged a determined fight against all those ethical ideals which have no immediate social value. Man should instead seek as much pleasure and happiness as he can in this life without depriving his fellows of their rightful share. Whatever relations gave pleasure to all concerned could not but be beneficial. Therefore they saw no good in the traditional demands for chastity between the sexes. Only those pleasures which inflicted direct and immediate harm upon society could be rejected. The philosophers of the so-called Age of Enlightenment were the protagonists of religious liberty because much more of their indifference to religion than to their faith in the principle of toleration itself.

Having destroyed what they considered the foolish errors of the past, the apostles of the "Enlightenment" believed that reason and science spread by universal mass education would usher in a virtual heaven on earth. Now that man possessed the magic key of science, it was within his power to shape his own destiny. Liberty, social and economic equality and universal peace would reign over the entire world. They were confident that ever-increasing scientific knowledge would for ever banish all disease and suffering leading to an indefinite prolongation of human life. The technological and scientific revolutions of the following century served to confirm this new faith in the perfectibility of human life on this earth without the aid of any supernatural power.

Darwin's concept of the evolution of man from lower forms of life introduced a wholly new scale of values. Philosophers now conceived of human society in a constant state of flux and change inevitably leading to higher and more complex stages of development. The principles of biological evolution applied to human society identified the "modern", "up-to-date", "advance" and "progressive" with what was most desirable. Historians came to look upon man as a product as well as a part of nature evolving to his present state from lowly origins with



all his achievements having been painfully acquired in the struggle against a hostile environment. Darwin convinced Western philosophers that man was an animal species like any other – a higher mammal to be sure – but only an animal. William James even questioned the value of retaining the intangible concept of consciousness or mind at all regarding human thought as merely the end, result of chemical reactions upon the nervous system produced by external stimuli. Psychologists such as Pavlov sought to delve into the motives of human behaviour by studying dogs, monkeys and apes.

Freud's discovery of the compulsive drives of the unconscious mind originating in early childhood as the source of all irrational behaviour provided modern philosophers with yet an additional weapon against religion. Freud maintained that the small child projected the image of his parents, who gave him life, protected him from harm and subjected him to discipline, punishment and reward on to his religious faith in adult life. The concept that religion is purely man-made and that ethics are relative and not absolute is enthusiastically welcomed by students of anthropology. Most other apologists would agree with Ralph Linton that the uncompromising monotheism of Islam originated in the rigidly patriarchal family life of the Semitic tribes. He writes in *The Tree of Culture*,

The concept of all-powerful deity who can only be placated by complete submission and devotion, no matter how unjust his acts may appear, was the direct outgrowth of Semitic family life. Another product of the exaggerated super-ego to which it gave rise was the elaborate system of taboos relating to every aspect of behaviour which are epitomized in the Law of Moses. Such codes of taboos provided those who kept them with a sense of security comparable to that of the good child who is able to remember everything that his father told him to do and carefully abstains from doing it. Allah is the portrait of the typical Semitic father with his patriarchal authoritarian qualities abstracted and exaggerated...

Freud, not content to deny the divine origin of religion, rejected the idea that faith was justified on any grounds whatsoever:



It seems not to be true that there is a power in the universe which watches over the well-being of every individual with parental care bringing all within his fold to a happy ending. On the contrary, the destinies of men are incompatible with any universal principle of justice. Earthquakes, floods and fires do not distinguish between the good and devout man and the sinner and unbeliever. Even if we leave inanimate nature out of account and consider only the destinies of individual men in so far as they depend on their relations with others of their own kind, it is by no means the rule that virtue is rewarded and wickedness punished. It often happens that the violent, crafty and unprincipled seized the desirable goods of this world while the pious go empty away. Dark, unfeeling and unloving powers determine human destiny, the concept of divine justice which according to religion governs the world, seem to have no existence... No attempt to minimize the supremacy of science can alter the fact that it takes into account our dependence on the real external world while religion is only a childish illusion which derives its strength from the fact that it happens to fall in with our instinctual desires.

Bertrand Russell develops this thoroughgoing materialistic and atheistic philosophy even further when he writes,

That man is the product of causes which had no provision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no amount of heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave, that all the labour of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration of human genius are destined for extinction in the vast death of the solar system and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins – all these things are so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffold of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair can man's habitation be safely built.

After denying any positive value to religious faith, Freud had to admit that science is an unsatisfactory substitute:

Science, apart from the emphasis on the real world, has essentially negative characteristics such as that it limits itself to tangible material truth and rejects illusions. Some of our fellow men who are dissatisfied with this state of affairs and desire something more for their momentary peace of mind may look for it where they can find it, but we cannot help them.



Schopenhauer carried this purely materialistic philosophy to its logical conclusions. For him the essence of life is aimless, restless activity, an utterly irrational force.

Since the basis of all desire is need, deficiency and thus pain, the nature of brute and man alike is originally and of its very essence subject to pain. If on the other hand, it is deprived of objects of desire through too easy satisfaction, such void and ennui fills the heart that existence becomes an unbearable burden. Thus life swings like a pendulum from pain to ennui, from ennui to pain. Life is a sea full of rocks and whirlpools which man avoids with greatest care and solitude although he knows that even if he succeeds in getting through, with all his efforts and skill, he comes thus but the nearer at every task to the greatest, the total inevitable ship-wreck death. Every human being and his course of life is but another short dream of the endless spirit of nature, the persistent will to live is only another fleeing from which nature carelessly sketches in its infinite pages, allows to remain for a time so short it vanishes into nothing and then obliterates to make room for others.

Thus we have traced the origins of Western materialistic philosophy from its origins during the Renaissance when men sought only to enjoy the pleasures of exercising their intellectual curiosity to investigate the world around them to the utter despair of Schopenhauer, who can find in this life nothing but meaningless futility. We have watched man, the vicegerent of God on earth with an immortal soul, a moral and spiritual being directly responsible to his Creator for his deeds, debased to an animal accountable to nothing but his physical and social requirements.

It is not at all surprising why such ideologies as Fascism, Nazism, Communism, Pragmatism and Zionism should flourish so luxuriantly in this soil. The directors of the Nazi concentration camps which organized murder on the scientific assembly line basis of gigantic factories, the Soviet secret police, the creators of the completely regimented life of the Communes in Communist China and those Zionist leaders responsible for the ruthless expulsion of an entire people from their homeland would all agree with Nietzsche that God is dead.



Because of the extraordinary virility of its economic and political power, Western civilization was able to extend its domination over the world. When the nations of Asia and Africa were finally able to win their struggle for political freedom from imperialist bondage, their indigenous cultures had long since been crushed. Their leaders, almost without exception, educated in European and American schools, were simultaneously taught to despise their native heritage and imbued with the philosophies of Western materialism.

Thus the leaders of Asia and Africa are at one with those of Europe and America in regarding progress through the development of large-scale heavy industry, the raising of the material standard of living and the expansion of economic and political power as the supreme goals of human society. We must not confuse Islamic methods of combating social and economic injustice with those of the West. Islam regards a certain minimum of physical well-being essential if the soul is to be freed from exclusive concern with bodily needs to the fulfilment of its spiritual life. In Islam, man's material welfare is only a means, in contrast to the West, which regards it as an end in itself.

No wonder Western forms of totalitarian dictatorships are so attractive to the leaders of Asia and Africa! Impatient to adopt the social, economic and political systems of the West, they cannot help but be deeply impressed by the rapidly growing prestige of Communist China. The price which China has had to pay for her political and economic expansion in millions of ruined individual lives does not concern them in the least, because they consider that the end fully justifies the means.

One might think that the erosion of the world's cultural variety would lead to greater harmony and unity among peoples. However, we have seen that from its inception, the basic theme of Western civilization has been its revolt against all spiritual and religious values. In view of this outlook prevailing in the world today, one can easily understand why there is more hatred, strife and violent upheavals than ever before in history. Gone is any sense of moral responsibility in



international relations. In the sessions of the United Nations, delegates do not hesitate to lie, distort and twist facts without the slightest scruple whenever it suits their purposes, for anything that promotes the national interest, even at the expense of other countries, can never be wrong. Delegates at the United Nations do not vote according to the merit of the issues involved but purely for the sake of expediency.

The leaders of the Muslim countries are no less guilty than any others, for they too have been deluded by the philosophies of Western materialism. Some of them speak glibly about the necessity of reconciling Islam with the spirit of the modern age. To do this, they say that a distinction must be made between the social content of the Qur'an and its spiritual teaching. The former, reflecting the conditions of seventh-century Arabia, must be rejected as irrelevant to the fact that Islam is a complete harmonious way of life infinitely superior to anything the West has ever been able to produce. Rejection of any part destroys the whole.

The January 6, 1960, issue of the "New York Times" reported that the Ministry of Education of Turkey had ordered the destruction of all unauthorized schools said to be conducting secret classes in the Qur'an. The article went on to explain that secret instruction in the Qur'an had been forbidden in Turkey for several years, as subversive. The leaders of Turkey, like the leaders of all the other Muslim countries, must choose what they want – Western materialistic philosophy or the Qur'an. They cannot have both.



## Chapter 2

### A Critique of *Islam in Modern History*<sup>1</sup>

The theme of this book is the author's analysis of the reaction of Muslim intellectuals in the Arab world, Turkey, Pakistan and India to the challenges of twentieth-century civilization.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith clearly regards the creation of Pakistan as a mistake. He chides the Pakistanis for idealizing the past. He says, "It is impossible, indeed meaningless, to try to reproduce in one age, the government of another. Pakistan cannot relieve a segment of the history of Arabia."

The author paints a bright future for the Muslims who remained in India:

In the 1930s Hussain Ahmad Madani, pronouncing India to be the nation of its Muslims, provoked from Muhammad Iqbal a scornful retort in poetry that a Muslim can have no other nation than Islam. Recent events have at least begun to dislodge this conviction. The Indian Muslims have seen law and order prevail. They have seen how police have stopped fanatical Hindu riots against them and how the government has prevented the conversion of a mosque into a Hindu temple. They find themselves free to practise and preach their religion. Not much reflection is needed to realize that the welfare of the Muslims in India depend on a secular state. Whatever traditional theology may say, secularism works. As a result, relatively few Indian Muslims still cling to the Islamic state idea.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith cannot accept the fact that Islam is more than a system of belief and ritual, a complete way of life which in both theory and practice is absolutely irreconcilable with Hindu culture. To judge Pakistan as a mistake just because there has been some corruption in the government and controversy as to what form a modern Islamic state should take

---

<sup>1</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1957. (Mentor Book, New York, Sept. 1959)



completely misses the point. In order for Islamic civilization to find full expression in that part of the world, there had to be a Pakistan. Even if the Pakistani Muslims have failed to make the most of their potentialities, the opportunity for them to do so still exists which is lacking in India.

The author, however, reserves his harshest criticism for the Arabs. He brands them as unrealistic reactionaries and isolationists who are unjustified in feeling that the West is out to crush Islam. He chides the Ulama of Al-Azhar for hesitating to compromise the doctrines of Islam in order to make them more compatible with Western ideas. The Arabs have failed to produce a Thomas Paine or a Voltaire; he regards this as one of their major shortcomings.

The only Muslim people for which the author seems to have any real sympathy are the Turks. As is well known, under Kemal Ataturk, the Caliphate, the Shariah, the Arabic alphabet and the Muslim calendar were abolished. As if all this radical surgery was not enough, religious organizations were banned, Muslim universities forcibly closed and major mosques like Saint Sophia were converted into museums.

"Already," he says, "during the 1920s, sweeping changes in the ceremonies of Islam including its prayer ritual and mosque services were being officially discussed." This included, among other things, the elimination of Arabic, and the prayer prostration as well as the introduction into the mosque of pews and a choir singing Western-style hymns to the accompaniment of an organ.

"By what religious authority, it may well be asked, did they proceed to do this? The modernist Turk proceeds on the authority of the revolution." Yet Kemal Ataturk was an apostate who could not boast enough of his atheism. But the author, ignoring this fact, continues to argue, "Certainly the Turks have not renounced Islam but reviewed it. They feel that if Islam is to be acceptable to the educated modern man, it will have to be expressed in an entirely different way."

The result has not only been the repudiation by Turkish intellectuals of the Shariah but also a feeling of isolation and a lack of identification with the rest of the Islamic world.



On few subjects are modernist Turks so emphatic as asserting that pan-Islamism is dead. And on no question are their emotions so quick as in disclaiming any religious involvement with the modern Arabs who are to many of them repellent and contemptible, to say the least. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that some Turks consider Arab Muslims much as an American Protestant might look down upon an Ethiopian Copt; politically irrelevant and religiously benighted. Any suggestion that the new faculty of theology at Ankara would be another Azhar is either laughable or shocking. Rather they intend it to compare with the Union Theological Seminary at Harvard.

The author declares that if a Martin Luther were to appear, he would get a ready hearing among the educated classes in Turkey. The assumption here, he says, is not a question of becoming Christian, but rather of being modern instead of medieval.

The spirit of modern Western civilization is so hostile to religion that even Christianity has fared miserably. Today in most of Europe and America, Christianity, especially the Protestant faith, is remote from the daily life of its adherents who only occasionally go to church to pay it lip service. Yet this seems to be the only future that Wilfred Cantwell Smith can suggest as desirable for Islam.

A case can be made that divisions between different civilizations are no longer valid and that modern civilization, though it first made its appearance in the West, is spreading throughout the world and superseding all other cultural patterns. Modern secularism is therefore no longer distinctively Western but has become a universal trend which all civilizations are in the process of assimilating. As a result the mundane welfare of the Muslim peoples will increasingly depend on social progress independent of religious consideration. Secularism must be religiously tolerated. If the Muslims resist this Caesar-God dichotomy, they are doomed.

In other words, Muslims must destroy their faith if they are to preserve it! According to this same sinister reasoning, the sophisticated Turkish intellectuals who frankly repudiate the teachings of the Qur'an, the authority of the Sunnah and abandon the Shariah, not only in practice but also as an ideal



towards which to strive, can rightfully claim to possess the truest Islam!

Wilfred Cantwell Smith likes to have himself regarded by Muslims as a sympathetic student of Islam. He claims his observations to be objective, but a careful reading of this book by any sincere, thinking Muslim will clearly reveal the abysmal depths of his hostility. Unfortunately his thinking represents the views of the majority of orientalist both in my country and abroad. Their basic enmity of Islam differs from that of the old-fashioned Christian missionary only in that it is expressed in a much more subtle way.



## *Chapter 3*

### **The Enemy from Within**

Islam is far more seriously menaced from within than from without. Deadliest of its enemies are the growing numbers of renegades from the faith. Those who hold positions of leadership in the governments of Muslim countries have the power to inflict the worst damage. Were they only to declare their apostasy openly, they would receive the condemnation they deserve. Instead they take advantage of the loyalty of their people who hesitate to criticize any of their activities so long as they remain nominal Muslims.

Perhaps no other idea has done Islam more harm than the modern concept of nationalism. That humanity should be artificially divided according to race and language and owe its supreme allegiance to a geographical entity is absolutely irreconcilable with Islam, which teaches that the only genuine bonds of unity between people are common spiritual values.

The first articulate Crusader for the Western concept of nationalism in the Muslim world was the Turkish sociologist Ziya Gokalp (1876–1924). In his writings he argues that there is no incompatibility between Islam and Western civilization. He rejects the idea that Islam is a civilization and that modern Western civilization is connected with Christianity. In other words, civilization and religion are two separate things. Therefore, he claims that the adoption of Western civilization by Muslims will not interfere with their faith.

Now the mission of the Turks is nothing but to uncover the pre-Islamic Turkish past which has remained with the people and to graft Western civilization in its entirety on to it. To equal the European powers militarily and in the sciences and industry, our only road to salvation is to adopt Western civilization completely.



Ziya Gokalp rejects the idea of the supremacy of the *Ummat* because it conflicts with the Western concept of nationality.

Among the pre-Islamic Turks, patriotism reached its highest levels. In the future, as in the past, patriotism should be the most important area of morality for the Turks because the nation and its soil is ultimately the only self-existing unit. Loyalty to the nation must take precedence over loyalty to the family or to religion. Turkism should give the highest priority to Nation and Fatherland.

How can any Muslim reconcile this to the verse in the Qur'an, which says, "Hold fast all of you to the cable of Allah and do not separate," or to the Prophet's Farewell Message, "Know that every Muslim is a brother of every other Muslim and that you are all one brotherhood?" The Prophet expressed the attitude of Islam towards the whole subject in clear, unambiguous language when he said, "He is not of us who calls men to patriotism; he is not of us who fights for patriotism; and he is not of us who dies for patriotism."

Kemal Ataturk derived the inspiration for his anti-Islamic reforms directly from the philosophy of Ziya Gokalp.

In the September 1957 issue of *Islamic Review*, Jean Paul Roux, author of the article, "A Study of Islam in Turkey", says that Ataturk did not want to break away from Islam but merely relieve Turkey of the control of the Muslim religion over the political and social life of the country. In transforming Turkey into a modern Western nation, his reforms were not directed against Islam as such but only in so far as it hindered the achievement of the desired goal.

Apologists for Ataturk pursue this sort of devious reasoning. But we shall presently see that whenever Islam is attacked in the political sphere, personal piety is also profoundly affected. Kamal Ataturk's measures were not designed to separate religion from the state so much as to the destruction of Islam by the state. Kemal Ataturk's decrees

1. Closed many major mosques like Saint Sophia converting them into museums.



2. Closed down religious schools and universities replacing them with purely secular institutions.
3. Banned all religious organizations and imprisoned the leaders.
4. Prohibited pilgrimage to Makkah and Madinah. Only in recent years has the pilgrimage been once more allowed.
5. Made the wearing of the Western hat with brim obligatory. This was purposely designed to make it difficult for Muslims to pray in the prescribed manner as in prostration the forehead could not touch the ground.
6. Substituted the Latin alphabet for the Arabic script. This was designed to produce a cultural gap between Turkey and the neighbouring Muslim countries. The Latin alphabet was also designed to produce a new generation ignorant of the Islamic classics in the Arabic script, thus severing their links with the past.

It is often argued that nationalism is of value in preserving the unique identity of different peoples, thus adding richness to the cultural variety of the world, but in studying the development of nationalism in Muslim countries, I have found quite the opposite to be the case. Although the struggle against Western political domination is universal, there seems to be no corresponding resistance to an indiscriminate imitation of Western modes of life based on materialistic philosophies.

One would imagine that the Tunisian and Moroccan Muslim nationalists who strived so valiantly to achieve freedom from French rule would take advantage of this opportunity to assert the cultural and religious identity of their people. Instead, what do we find? Scorning the Shariah, they zealously copy French laws, French customs and French system of education.

In the July 5, 1957, issue of the "New York Times" appeared an article explaining that the main idea behind the creation of the University of Morocco was to absorb all existing Islamic institutions of higher learning and to Westernize them.



The major reform involved was the establishment of a programme of Western secular studies at the Qarawiyin University Mosque in Fez, which for centuries has been a centre of Muslim education. The reorganization of the curriculum at Qarawiyin will subordinate Muslim law and instead stress the training of lawyers for actual practice under the modern Moroccan code based on French law. In future the Ulama will be required to take standard Western secular legal training before they could qualify for office.

So long as Qarawiyin University remained true to Islam in the search for knowledge and truth, it produced such geniuses as Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Maja, Ibn al-Arabi, Ibn Tufail and Maimonides. In throwing over-board its great heritage, Qarawiyin and the world will have nothing to gain and everything to lose.

The influence of Islam in the modern world has weakened to such an alarming extent that the President of Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba, in a nation-wide speech delivered over the radio on February 18, 1960, dared publicly attack the fast of Ramadhan, blaming it for hindering Tunisia's economic development. "Fasting may be intended to clarify the spirit by enfeebling the body, but what I need are strong bodies to revolutionize this country and raise us to the Western standard of living!" President Bourguiba argued that the struggle for economic development excuses workers from the Ramadhan fasts. He then bitterly denounced the Rector of Zaitouna University for refusing to consider the economic growth of Tunisia more important than the Ramadhan.

That Ramadhan is responsible for the backwardness of Tunisia or any other Muslim country is sheer non-sense. As for the ridiculous charge that Ramadhan is injurious to health, the following verse is sufficient:

And whosoever of you is present (in sound health), let him fast the month and whosoever of you is sick or on a difficult journey, let him fast the same number of other days. Allah desires for you ease. He desireth not hardship for you but only that ye complete the period and magnify Allah for having guided you. (II:185)



The May 1959 issue of the *Islamic Literature* published an article entitled "Islam and Nationalism" by John G. Hazam, Professor of Political Science at City College in New York City, in which the author argues that

If Muslims are to build on stout foundations strong and progressive states capable of successfully defending themselves against external aggression and securing the proper respect of Europe and America, then they must relinquish their antiquated notions of religious universality which hardly fit the needs of a dynamic modern society. Orthodox Muslims should confine themselves to private piety, and in their mundane affairs should conscientiously resolve to expedite the process of emancipating themselves from the restraining hand of the Middle Ages so that they might be on a more advantageous position to grapple intelligently with the urgent demands of modern living.

However there is ample reason to believe that a 'reformed' Islam is still capable of making valuable contributions, if carefully selected and diverted into proper channels, in reinforcing the cause of freedom and democracy. But the interests of the state must never be subordinated or sacrificed to those of the mosque.

Islam can never be "reformed" for it is perfect in itself. The last *ayat* revealed in the Qur'an during the Prophet's Farewell Message makes this clear enough. "This day are those who disbelieve in despair of ever harming your religion but fear them not! Fear Me! This day have I perfected your religion and chosen for you al-Islam!" (V:3).

Ziya Gokalp, Kemal Ataturk and Habib Bourguiba, all share in common the conviction that Islamic civilization does not essentially differ from any other human culture which flourishes, then stagnates and finally collapses into ruin. Without exception they believe that the Qur'an and the Sunnah were merely meant for seventh-century Arabia and therefore applicable for only limited time and place. When they discovered that the spirit of Islam could never be reconciled with that of the modern West, they concluded that it must be relinquished as "out of date".

But is it not nationalism which artificially limits men's horizons to narrow geographical frontiers more truly out of date



in this age when modern means of communication and transportation have annihilated time and distance? If modern technology has made this world economically, is it not equally imperative that the world become united spiritually?

Those who call themselves Muslims and maintain that Islam is a mere culture among many others – a mere outcome of human thoughts and endeavours and not an absolute Law decreed by God Almighty to be followed by the human race at all times and places – have truly lost their faith and have become “the enemy from within”.



## Chapter 4

### A Refutation of the Philosophy of Ziya Gokalp<sup>1</sup>

How can the Turks harmonize their cultural heritage with that of modern Western civilization? The discussion of this question is the theme of the writings of Ziya Gokalp. Thirty-six years after his death, Ziya Gokalp remains the most influential thinker Turkey has produced since the beginning of this century. Born in 1876 and educated at Istanbul, he eventually became professor of sociology at the university, writing most of his essays between 1911 and 1918 and from 1922 until his death in 1924. Kemal Ataturk, lacking a brilliant intellect, borrowed the ideas for his drastic reforms directly from the philosophy of Ziya Gokalp.

In contrast to Kemal Ataturk, who made no secret of his atheism, Ziya Gokalp always regarded himself as a good Muslim. He was compelled to resort to an astonishing range of mental gymnastics in an attempt to harmonize his faith with his philosophy.

We shall create a genuine civilization – a Turkish civilization which will follow the growth of a New Life. To classify the Turks, who are fairer and more handsome than the Aryans, with the Mongolian race has no scientific foundation. The Turkish race has not degenerated like other races by alcohol and debauchery. Turkish blood has remained rejuvenated and hardened like steel with the glories of the battlefield. Turkish intelligence is not worn out; its sentiments are not effeminate; its will is not weakened. The conquest of the future is promised to Turkish resolution.

Indoctrination with this sort of nonsense, reminiscent of Nazi Germany, made wounded Turkish soldiers, during the Korean war, refuse blood transfusions from other nationalities.

---

<sup>1</sup>Ziya Gokalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization* (translated from Turkish by Niyazi Berkes), Columbia University Press, New York, 1959.



I wish I could ask Ziya Gokalp how he would reconcile such myths of racial superiority with the teachings of the Qur'an.

Western civilization is a continuation of ancient Mediterranean civilization. The founders of the Mediterranean civilization were Turkish peoples such as the Sumerians, Scythians, the Phoenicians and the Hyksos. There was a Turanian Age in history before the ancient ages for the earliest inhabitants of Western Asia were our forefathers. Much later the Muslim Turks improved this civilization and transmitted it to the Europeans. By destroying both the Western and Eastern Roman empires, the Turks revolutionized the history of Europe. Thus we are part of Western civilization and have a share in it.

This remarkable distortion of history supports the wild claims advanced by some Turkish historians that the great peoples of antiquity were either Turks themselves or civilized by the Turks. The Phoenicians and the Hyksos were both Semitic peoples; the Scythians were akin to the Persians while the Sumerians defy ethnic classification. Ziya Gokalp forgot to even mention the Egyptians. Would he consider them Turks too?

The Western Roman Empire was destroyed when its territories were overrun by tribes of Germanic origin. The role played by the Huns, despite their destructiveness, was insignificant. The kinship between the Huns and the peoples of present-day Turkey is dubious, to say the least, and were I to be a Turk, I would scarcely take pride in claiming to be one of their descendants!

The Eastern Roman Empire was destroyed not by the Turks but by the Crusaders, who completely devastated it in 1204. The capture of Constantinople in 1453 was the result rather than the cause of the downfall of Byzantium.

When Islam first began to expand its power and influence over the world, the Turks were an unorganized conglomeration of illiterate nomads. For centuries fighting as mercenary soldiers was their sole contribution to Islamic civilization. Not until the eleventh century did the Turks, under the Seljuks and their successors, the Ottomans, emerged as a powerful force. By this time, most of the classics on science and philosophy had long since been translated from Arabic into Latin. In the



transmission of Muslim learning to medieval Europe, the Turks took little, if any, part.

When a nation advances to higher stages of its evolution, it finds it necessary to change its civilization too. When the Turks were nomadic tribesmen in Central Asia, they belonged to the civilization of the Far East. When they passed to the stage of the Sultanistic state, they entered into the area of Byzantine civilization. And today in their transition to the nation-state they are determined to accept Western civilization.

Peoples belonging to various religions may belong to the same civilization. The Japanese and the Jews share the identical civilization with Europe despite their difference in religion. In other words, civilization and religion are two separate things. Thus it is just as erroneous to speak of Islamic civilizations as it is to call Western civilization Christian. Religion is confined to beliefs and rituals with which the arts and sciences have no connection.

Here Ziya Gokalp presents the reader with a bundle of contradictions. He tries so hard to prove that the Turks are already part of Western civilization and then he compares them with the Japanese, admitting that it is just as alien to the former as it is to the latter. Because the Japanese were able to adopt Western civilization without losing their national or religious identity, he asks, "Why can't we accept it too and still be Turks and Muslims?"

Although Japan has managed to maintain her national sovereignty, there is no question that her indigenous culture has been seriously undermined. Although the missionaries were never successful in converting the Japanese to Christianity, the influence of Shinto and Buddhism has waned considerably leaving the majority of Japanese youth without any strong religious beliefs.

Not only is it true that wherever Western civilization penetrates, it destroys all forms of indigenous culture at variance with it. But even more important, the West, because of its history, is basically more hostile to Islam than to any other religion. When the Chinese Communists destroyed the monasteries of Tibet, there was a great outcry of horror in the Western press, but when the President of Tunisia, Habib



Bourguiba, attacked the fast of Ramadan, these same periodicals eulogized him as the epitome of progress and enlightenment.

Western civilization has been avowedly secular only since the French Revolution. Until that time, its culture was dominated by the church. The works of the greatest Western artists were thoroughly religious in both subject matter and conception. Although I agree with Ziya Gokalp in his assertion that there is no inherent conflict between modern scientific discoveries and Islam, the purposes to which this knowledge has been applied have been directed mainly by materialistic philosophies.

When we study the history of Christianity, we see that following the Crusades, a new movement arose in Europe which aimed at imitating Islam and finally culminated in the Reformation. The Protestants rejected the Papacy, the church hierarchy, and the Priesthood as contrary to the principles of Islam.

The modern state in Europe first arose in the Protestant countries. Sociologists of religion believe that the decline of the Latin countries was due to their Catholicism; the backwardness of the Russians was a consequence of their orthodoxy while the progress of the Anglo-Saxon nations was a result of the fact that they had freed themselves from the Catholic traditions and approached the principles of Islam. Are we not then justified in considering Protestantism an Islamicized form of Christianity?

The Crusades, far from promoting feelings of mutual friendship between Christians and Muslims as Ziya Gokalp would have us believe, created such bitter enmity that it still lingers on today. Martin Luther had as fanatical hatred of Islam as any of his Catholic adversaries. In comparing the superficial resemblances between Islam and Protestantism, Ziya Gokalp indulged in mere wishful thinking. He harps on the subject only to prove that nationalism is compatible with Islam. But how can he forget the horrible bloody wars that resulted when the unity of Christendom was shattered into innumerable rival hostile sects? Does he want the same thing to happen to Islam? Evidently he does, for this is clearly revealed in his attitude towards Arabic.

The land where the Call to Prayer resounds in Turkish; where those who pray understand the meaning of their religion; the land where the Qur'an is recited in Turkish; where every man knows



full well the command of God – Oh son of Turkey, that land is thy fatherland!

No sensible person would ever think that a translation can ever take the place of the Qur'an in Arabic. Not only is the preservation of the Qur'an as exactly as it was originally revealed and it is safe from the corruption the Bible suffered, but the prestige of the Arabic language has served as a strong bond of unity among Muslims all over the world. Ziya Gokalp would smash this unity and transform the universal brotherhood of Islam into a Turkish sect:

While Western Europeans freed themselves from medievalism, the Christians of the Orthodox Church in Russia were still enslaved by it. Peter the Great encountered many difficulties in his struggle to free the Russians from Byzantine civilization and introduce them to Western civilization. In order to learn what sort of methods should be followed in Westernizing a country, it suffices to study the history of Peter's reforms. Until then the Russians were believed incapable of any progress but after the Revolution, they began to progress very rapidly. This historical fact is enough to prove that Western civilization is the only avenue to advancement.

We have to accept the civilization of the West or be enslaved by the powers of the West. Between these two alternatives we must choose. We must master the civilization of the West in order to defend our freedom and independence!

Does Ziya Gokalp want Turkey to follow the lead of the Soviet Union? He denounces Marxism, yet he accepts the soil on which it flourishes. The Soviet Union is rapidly surpassing all other countries, including my own, in technology, in military might and world influence. Suppose my country, the United States, thought the adoption of Soviet methods essential to its national survival. Suppose the American government, in order to avoid being enslaved by Soviet power, decided to abandon its Constitution and the Bill of Rights and replace them with a totalitarian police state? Even if as a result of this, my country managed to preserve its political sovereignty, would this not be meaningless after losing its very *raison d'être*? The same analogy is even truer when applied to Islam versus nationalism and secularism.



There is nothing original about Ziya Gokalp's ideas. He has tried to do to Islam just what Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan of India and Ali Abd al-Raziq tried to do in Egypt, namely accept the Western outlook of life as normative and attempted to show how Islam fits in with it. To do this, Ziya Gokalp, like Taha Hussein, has resorted to an unscrupulous distortion of historical facts. Like his predecessors and successors, Ziya Gokalp has used Islam as a mere instrument for defending a set of values utterly alien and contradictory to it. All over the Muslim world such protagonists of Westernization have sprung up like weeds yet nowhere have they been able to dominate the scene so completely as in Turkey. What is the reason behind this?

The answer was aptly expressed by Muhammad Abdullah Enan, Professor, Cairo University, when he said,

In spite of its gravity and decisive effects upon history, the great conquests of the Ottoman Turks did not bear the same spiritual significance displayed by the Arab Khalifates. To the Turks, the conquest of Constantinople was only a political and territorial gain which crowned their continuous efforts to wipe out the last vestige of the Byzantine Empire and open the way for their victorious march into the Balkans.

The Ottoman Empire was no more than a great secular power upheld solely by material force and military might without any civilizing ideals. Its Muslim colour was only outward and ephemeral. The transformation of Constantinople into a Muslim city and the Stronghold of the Khalifate never gave to the world the same spiritual ideals and brilliant civilization such as displayed in Damascus, Baghdad, Cordova and Cairo.

After destroying the legacy of the Byzantine civilization, the Ottoman Turks were unable to create a new civilization on their own as did the Moors in Spain. From the moral point of view, their coming under the banner of Islam was neither powerful nor deep rooted. Rather it was a superficial event which displayed only formal appearances without ever penetrating into the real depths.

Because of the reasons outlined above, Ziya Gokalp's ideas found such ready acceptance and the Turkish people so easily severed from their Islamic heritage.



## Chapter 5

### A Refutation of the Philosophy of Taha Hussein<sup>1</sup>

For nearly 40 years Taha Hussein has been the idol of the Egyptian intelligentsia. Born about 1890 in a small village on the upper Nile, as an infant he contracted ophthalmia, the dread eye disease which is the scourge of the Egyptian fellaheen. Despite his blindness, Taha Hussein memorized the entire Qur'an, which at the age of 13 won him a scholarship to Al-Azhar University. While studying in Cairo, he began to seek the company of Europeanized students and his desire to emulate them made him abandon Al-Azhar in disgust. One of the first awarded Ph.D. at the newly established Cairo University, he went to Paris to study at the Sorbonne, where he earned another Ph.D. and also met Suzanne Bresseau, whom he married in 1918. Upon his return to Egypt, he became Professor of Arabic Literature at Cairo University and later the Dean. During this time he began to write his controversial books in severe criticism of orthodox beliefs.

One of these, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, has exercised such tremendous influence over the minds of the younger generation that it has become a classic in its field. Taha Hussein begins his book by asking,

Is Egypt of the East or the West? We may paraphrase the question as follows: Would it be easier for the Egyptian mind to understand a Chinese and a Hindu or to understand an English man or Frenchman? This is the question we must answer before we begin to think of the foundations on which we shall have to base our culture.

He then goes on to say that since the beginning of history, there has existed two distinct and bitterly antagonistic civilizations – the one in Europe and the other in the Far East.

---

<sup>1</sup>Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (translated from Arabic by Sidney Fisher), American Council of Learned Societies, Washington, DC, 1954.



This statement is a great oversimplification of history. Modern Western civilization began its present-day trends less than 500 years ago. The industrial dynamism of the West is no direct continuation of the development of ancient Greek or Roman society but rather a unique product of the Renaissance. If one cannot speak of a single civilization "which has existed for time immemorial" in Europe, still less does this apply to the Far East. The Far East had never been culturally homogeneous. Hindu India and Confucian China differed as much from each other as they did from Medieval Europe.

Taha Hussein then cites the close ties between ancient Egypt and Greece. He says, "The Greeks during their Golden Age used to consider themselves the pupils of the Egyptians in civilization, particularly in the fine arts and government."

However the Greeks may have been stimulated by the contributions of Ancient Egypt in these fields, the contrast between the hieretic statues of Rameses and the sculpture of Pheidias, the Pharaonic monarchy and Athenian democracy, is too great to be able to assert that the latter was derived from the former.

Because of ancient Egypt's sustained relations with Greece and her lack of communication with the Far East, Taha Hussein argues "that Egypt has always been an integral part of Europe as far as its intellectual and cultural life was concerned in all its forms and branches."

The only period in which Egypt was culturally part of Europe was during the Hellenistic age inaugurated by Alexander the Great. But there is even less historic continuity between Pharaonic Egypt and Islamic Egypt than between the Athens of Pericles and Byzantium.

Taha Hussein cites the fierce rebellion of the Egyptians against the seventh-century Arab invasion, claiming that Egypt was the first country under Islamic rule to assert its national personality.

The battles against the Arabian invaders were waged not by native Egyptians but exclusively by Byzantine mercenary troops who, despite their superior numbers and equipment, were quickly routed by General Amr. The native Egyptian Copts, persecuted for their faith by the Byzantine monarchs,



welcomed the tolerant ruler of the Muslims. Although Egypt emerged as an independent entity under the dynasty of Ibn Tulun (868–884), the rulers as well as their subjects regarded themselves as Muslims rather than as Egyptians. Nationalism, as we know it today, simply did not exist.

Taha Hussein insists that the adoption of Islam and the Arabic language did not make Egypt any more “Easter” than Europe when its people embraced Christianity.

How is it possible for fair-minded persons to see no harm coming to the European mind from reading the Gospel and at the same time to regard the Qur’an as purely Eastern even though it is proclaimed that the Qur’an was sent only to confirm and complete what is in the Gospel? They must explain what distinguishes Christianity from Islam for both stem from the same source.

Taha Hussein speaks as if Christianity were identical with Islam. He seems to forget that the Gospel the Christians regard as their scripture is not the same Gospel to which the Qur’an refers. The original message God revealed to Jesus has been lost. All that the Christians possess are four of the apocryphal biographies of Jesus, which were not canonized until centuries after his so-called death. Although Jesus, like Muhammad, spoke a Semitic language, the Christian scriptures were written down in Greek instead. Jesus did not know a word of Greek. The doctrines of the trinity, the divinity of Christ, original sin, and the vicarious atonement by his death on the Cross originated with Paul – not Jesus. Paul was a thoroughly Hellenized Greek-speaking Roman citizen who could not help but be influenced by his environment. And it was Paul, rather than Jesus, who determined the subsequent history of Christianity. Yet Taha Hussein can still insist that

The essence of Islam is the same essence of Christianity. The connection of Islam with Greek philosophy is identical to that of Christianity. Whence then comes the difference in the effect of these two faiths on the creation of the mind that mankind inherited from Greece? Why is Europe’s connection with Greek culture during the Renaissance one of the props of the European mind whereas her connection with this same Greek philosophy through



Islam is not so regarded? Can we seriously maintain the existence of important difference between the peoples living on the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean?

We have seen how the influence of Greece and Rome permeated the Christian faith from its inception. This was not true of Islam. The Qur'an is in Arabic – not Greek – and, unlike the Christian scriptures, has been preserved in its purity. No Muslim equivalent of Paul ever appeared to corrupt the doctrine of Islam. Aristotelian philosophers such as Ibn Rushd had a far greater impact on Medieval Europe than on the Islamic world. Hellenism was rejected in favour of the more purely Islamic theology formulated by Al-Ghazzali.

Taha Hussein maintains that the common roots Muslims share with Christians make Islam far more spiritually compatible with the West than with Oriental countries such as India or China. Thus for Taha Hussein, Westernization is not a problem for the Islamic world or for Egypt, but an inevitable consequence of its innate characteristics.

Despite the incessant rivalry between European Christianity and Islam, which reached its climax during the Crusades, it is true that Muslims did have more in common with Christians than with the Hindus or Buddhists of the Far East. Here Taha Hussein is right. However, he fails to take into account that since the French Revolution, the supremacy of secularism has made Western civilization a deadly poison to every religion.

Europe today resembles the Abbasid Near East in the richness of its civilization which, like any human creation, has its good and bad aspects. Our religious life will not suffer from our adoption of Western civilization any more than it suffered when we took over the Persian and Byzantine civilization.

Here Taha Hussein contradicts himself. He has, until now, exerted all his efforts to prove that Egypt is part of Europe, resisting all Oriental influences and then he admits that the acceptance of Persian and Byzantine culture did Islam no harm.

The adoption of any way of life, whether from the "East" or from the "West", cannot fail to undermine the moral strength of Islam if it is contrary to the teachings of the Qur'an. Persian and Byzantine culture was no exception. Women enjoyed a high and



honourable status until the Muslim rulers considered it fashionable to imitate the courts of the Persian and Byzantine kings. Only then did the harem system with its limitless concubines, eunuchs and slaves become the curse of Muslim society. Homosexuality and sodomy, in which the Greeks shamelessly indulged, spread like a cancer. Such perversion was rare among the Arabs during the lifetime of the Prophet. Government during the first four Caliphs was remarkably democratic until Muawiya, in imitation of Persia and Byzantium, transformed the Caliphate into a despotic hereditary monarchy. This was the moral decadence that rotted Islamic society from within.

Although Taha Hussein admits that there is much materialism in Western civilization, he insists that it still contains considerable spiritual content. He supports his argument by citing those airplane test pilots "who voluntarily expose themselves to horrible injury and even death in order to extend man's mastery over nature".

While there is nothing in the Qur'an opposing scientific research, quite the contrary its teachings regard the mastery of man over themselves more important than mastery over the physical forces of nature. In other words, to conquer one's own lusts, pride, greed and selfishness is a far greater achievement than sending a rocket to the moon. Yet the assumption of the West is just the opposite.

If God had preserved us from Ottoman conquest and rule, we should have remained in unbroken touch with Europe and shared in her renaissance. As a matter of fact, the Europeans borrowed the methods that prevailed in the Islamic world during the Middle Ages. They did just what we are doing now. It is only a matter of time.

These days it has become fashionable for Muslims to argue as does Taha Hussein that because Europe derived her spirit of scientific inquiry from the Arabs, in the process of Westernization, Muslims are only reclaiming their rightful heritage. By this sort of sophistry, Muslims justify the abandonment of their faith. They forget that it is not science in



itself which determines the quality of a civilization but rather the uses to which it is put and the consequences that result.

The transmission of Muslim learning to Medieval Europe did not make her people part of Islamic civilization. The medieval Europeans never sought to adopt Arabian dress, Arabian customs and mode of living in place of their own. Although Medieval Europe eagerly welcomed the achievements of Muslim science and philosophy, it was never willing to sacrifice its own cultural independence as the Muslim countries are doing now.

We Egyptians measure the progress of our nation solely in terms of the amount of our borrowing from the West. We have learned from Europe how to be civilized. Europeans have taught us to sit at the table, eat with knife and fork, sleep in beds instead of on the floor and to wear Western clothes. We seek no guidance in our government from the Khalifate. Instead, we have set up national secular courts and enacted laws in conformity with Western rather than Islamic codes. The dominant and undeniable fact of our times is that day by day we are drawing closer to Europe and becoming an integral part of her literally and figuratively.

Taha Hussein asserts that Westernization would be much more difficult if the Egyptian mind were basically different from the European one. In the same breath he chides his countrymen for lagging so far behind Japan in this respect. If Egypt were truly a cultural extension of Europe, Taha Hussein would have no need for any argument.

In all seriousness, do we wish to embrace the religion and philosophy of the Chinese just when they are rapidly Westernizing themselves? Those Egyptians who deride Western civilization would be the last to want to live like Chinese or Hindus.

Why should Taha Hussein assume that his fellow countrymen must choose between these two alternatives? Why should Egyptians want to be like either Chinese or Englishmen? Why should they not be proud to live as Muslims?

God has bestowed on us a boon to compensate for our calamities. The Western world has struggled for centuries to attain its present level of progress and now we have the opportunity to reach it within a generation. No power on earth is capable of preventing



us Egyptians from enjoying life exactly the way they do. In order to become equal partners in civilization with the Europeans we must literally and forthrightly do everything they do. Whoever advises any other course of action is either a deceiver or is himself deceived.

We must now raise the question as to whether Western civilization is superior to Islam as Taha Hussein so obviously believes. Certainly the Western world, by means of its technological efficiency, has promoted the general physical well-being and material prosperity of its people beyond the level of any preceding civilization. Yet no civilization can be judged on the basis of its technology alone. What of the arts? Which architecture is superior in grace and symmetry – the mosque of Ibn Tulun or the United Nations building? Western art reached its peak during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. It has been steadily declining ever since.

The decadence of modern art is the direct consequence of the loss of religious convictions. Both the “non-objective” painting and the “socialist realism” of the Communist countries are a perfect expression of the rejection of all spiritual values. The source of emotional depth and warmth, of beauty and design is God. Modern painting, sculpture and architecture are conspicuously lacking in all these attributes. The absence of God is equally reflected in such sordid plays of Tennessee Williams as “A Streetcar Named Desire” and “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof”. There is no God in modern jazz which caters to the crudest, most primitive instincts in man. And once a human being is reduced to the level of the beast, he begins to act like one.

In the collective farm settlements in Israel, for example, free love is the accepted thing. Children are taken from their mothers when a week old and brought up in nurseries. Consequently, the formalities of marriage are dispensed with and family life is eliminated. In Sweden, sex instruction begins in the first year of elementary school with the aim of preventing any taint of sin from being associated with the subject in the children’s minds. Adolescents are taught that there is nothing wrong with sexual relations outside marriage so long as the boy and the girl love each other and are prepared to take



responsibility for the children. Contraceptives are easily available to teenagers. However, this does not prevent at least a quarter of the babies born from being conceived out of wedlock. Swedes defend their moral standards by insisting that they are just as high as elsewhere.

Is Western secularism superior to Islam? Which is the higher motive – to do good without thought of tangible gain for the love of God or to do right simply for the sake of social convention? Which is the more advanced idea – the triumph of nationalism or the universal brotherhood of Islam? Which is the broader view – a purely this worldly emphasis or the affirmation of the hereafter?

Nationalism, secularism, the decay of the arts, the decline in moral standards, the rise of materialistic ideologies such as Fascism and Nazism and Communism combined with the mad rush to invent ever more deadly weapons of mass murder are all signs of the approaching downfall of the West. In adopting its civilization, Muslims will not share in its progress but only in its doom. Is this what Taha Hussein wants?



## Chapter 6

### A Discussion of *From Here We Start*<sup>1</sup>

From the day of its publication, Khalid Muhammad Khalid's book *From Here We Start* created a sensation. The book having been seized by the Council of Ulama at Al-Azhar and banned as heretical, a group of government spokesmen stepped in to defend it. Consequently when the ban was lifted, *From Here We Start* immediately became a best seller. It was not long before over a half million copies were sold. In view of the fact that three quarters of the Egyptian population is illiterate, this was indeed a phenomenal commercial success. Because I believe that everyone should be granted the freedom to express his thoughts, I oppose all kinds of censorship, particularly the banning of books. Yet, I completely agree with the Ulama of Al-Azhar that Khalid Muhammad Khalid's book must be considered as heretical.

The first chapter entitled "Religion – Not Priesthood" contrasts the former with the latter. Religion, says Khalid Muhammad Khalid, is humane and altruistic whereas priesthood is egotistic; religion is democratic whereas priesthood is totalitarian; religion is progressive whereas priesthood is reactionary.

According to Khalid Muhammad Khalid, the poverty of modern Egypt is due to the priesthood which monopolizes all the wealth of the country regarding the common people as slaves who should be grateful to grab what few crumbs are thrown out at them. What is most alarming of all, he goes on to say, is that these priests speak in the name of Islam, claiming that alms-giving constituted an adequate economic system.

---

<sup>1</sup>Khalid Muhammad Khalid, *From Here We Start* (translated from Arabic by Ismail al-Faruqi, Near Eastern Translation Programme No. 3), American Council of Learned Societies, Washington, DC, 1953.



This Islamic priesthood is not content to starve the body. It also starves the mind. It has persecuted every creative soul, rejected every useful new idea and denied every scientific truth.

Let's not forget what happened to Christianity. The defeat of the Western priesthood as a worldly power, due to the martyrs who fell in battle for the sake of freedom and progress, should be an instructive lesson for its living sister, the Egyptian priesthood.

Just what is this Islamic priesthood which Khalid Muhammad Khalid so loudly condemns? The answer to this puzzling question he never bothers to inform his readers. He is content to leave them guessing. However, I assume that he is referring to the Ulama and Shaikhs of Al-Azhar and perhaps to a lesser extent to the Muftis, Qaris and Imams attached to other mosques. By no objective definition could any of these religious functionaries be called priests. Their position confers on them no special sanctity; they are not bound by any holy vows of ordination, nor are they entitled to act as intermediaries between man and God. They are nothing more than scholars whose prestige is based on their learning and piety. Few Ulama have amassed any great wealth, much less could they be held responsible for Egypt's poverty. None has the power to deny Egypt the blessings of scientific progress, much less persecute scientists.

Now it is clear that the Islamic priesthood exists only in Khalid Muhammad Khalid's imagination, and the reader may begin to wonder what are the sources of his inspiration. For his supreme authorities, he takes the writings of such arch unbelievers as Thomas Paine, Voltaire and above all, English historian H. G. Wells, who in his *Outline of History* lost no opportunity to slander the Holy Prophet. What connection have these Western writers with Islam? Absolutely nothing. But this does not seem to trouble Khalid Muhammad Khalid at all. He is apparently under the delusion that Islam is exactly like Christianity. He even goes so far as to say that the mosques of Egypt should pattern themselves after the Protestant churches of Europe and America!



In advising his readers what measures should be taken to rid Egypt of the Islamic priesthood, the author reveals a few more pearls of his wisdom. First of all, Al-Azhar should be Westernized until it is not different from modern Protestant divinity schools. Mosque preachers should be trained like Protestant ministers. Only then would they support the forces of "advancement" and "progress". In the second place the government should restrict Friday prayer services to the larger mosques where only carefully selected preachers should be mere mouthpieces of propaganda for the policies of the secular state. Khalid Muhammad Khalid is not content to restrict these reforms to the mosques. "Have I forgotten the Coptic church?" he asks. "Oh no! I urge every one of these suggestions to be Coptic church as well!" One begins to wonder just who Khalid Muhammad Khalid thinks he is.

The remainder of *From Here We Start* is a passionate plea for the separation of religion from state. The author argues that because Muhammad led a life of austerity and self-denial, he never intended government to be part of Islam. Yet from the day Muhammad migrated from Makkah to Madinah, Islam was a state as well as a religion. Muhammad was ruler as well as Prophet. Madinah was the capital of a sovereign state by every definition of that term. The Prophet raised armies, declared war, concluded peace, signed treaties, received and sent ambassadors, levied taxes and dispensed justice as did all the Caliphs who succeeded him. But Khalid Muhammad Khalid argues that the Prophet did not really want to rule at all. Only expediency forced him to do so. According to him, prophethood is restricted exclusively to guidance and preaching. Yet the Holy Prophet himself said,

Islam and government are twin brothers. None of the two can be perfect without the other. Islam is like a great structure and government is its guardian. A building without a foundation crashes down and without a guardian is pilfered and robbed out!

Khalid Muhammad Khalid thinks that Islamic government under the Caliphs was as despotic and oppressive as that of the medieval Christian church. The Caliphate, of Abu Bakr and



Umar were so unique, he says, amidst the hundreds of bloody despotism that they can safely be regarded as unnatural exceptions.

Although the majority of Muslims have always considered Abu Bakr and Umar as the best Caliphs, Islam has not lacked other good rulers. Has Khalid Muhammad Khalid forgotten the valiance of Ali, the piety of Umar II or the chivalry of Saladin, all devoted servants of Islam?

Religious government, he says, stifles all freedom and creativity as threats to its power. This might have been true of ignorant popes, priests and monks of medieval Europe, but it certainly does not apply to Islam. The Caliphs were the patrons of learning. Chief among them was Caliph al-Mamun, who established his famous House of Wisdom where thousands of Greek manuscripts on science and philosophy were translated into Arabic. That the Muslims led the world for centuries in every field of culture is well known to students of history. Far from opposing these achievements, the Caliphs generously endowed schools and hospitals and patronized arts and sciences.

Another instinct of religious government, insists Khalid Muhammad Khalid, is its beastly cruelty. "It cuts throats and sheds blood without scruple on charges of ungodliness and heresy. Thus religious government, whether Christian or Muslim, represents the worst possible tyranny."

Again Khalid Muhammad Khalid seems to have thoroughly confused the history of Islam with that of medieval Christianity. In vain he can search the history books of Islam for such horrors as the Spanish Inquisition or the innumerable organized witch-hunts for heretics that terrorized medieval Europe.

The contrast between the bigotry dominating medieval Europe and the religious freedom prevailing in the Muslim world is amply illustrated in the case of Abul Ala al-Ma'arri, one of the most famous poets of Syria. Although Abul Ala al-Ma'arri in his writings publicly ridiculed every doctrine of Islam and openly proclaimed himself an unbeliever, his poetry was widely acclaimed during his lifetime for its artistic merits. Never molested in any way, Abu Ala al-Ma'arri died peacefully at a great old age.



It is not surprising why the enemies of Islam both in my country and abroad applauded *From Here We Start* as enthusiastically as they did Ali Abd al-Raziq's *Islam and the Principles of Government* 25 years earlier. They eulogized Khalid Muhammad Khalid as a highly gifted writer and as the embodiment of progress and enlightenment. His book was reviewed in American magazines as if it were a triumph of scholarship. Actually it is a mere rehash of the arguments set forth by Ali Abd al-Raziq in a much less convincing manner. No Muslim with even an elementary knowledge of his religion could take such nonsense seriously.

Khalid Muhammad Khalid is himself a graduate of Al-Azhar. If he undertook to write this book with sincerity and good intentions simply because he was too ignorant to know any better, this certainly is an unfavourable reflection on present educational standards in the Muslim world.



## Chapter 7

# Western Civilization Versus Islamic Civilization<sup>1</sup>

Frankly I must say that your editorial was far superior to any of the other published articles. In addition, I add that I felt too much emphasis was placed upon the obvious and well-known contributions of Islamic learning to medieval Europe. Although we cannot afford to ignore these achievements, I nevertheless could not help but sense that many of the contributing authors used the past to escape from the realities of the present.

The achievements of Muslims a thousand years ago, however great, fail to provide any guarantee that Islam will flourish in the future. To survive, Muslims must strive with all their energy to make possible a meaningful application of Islamic principles to every vital phase of human society.

Although I completely agree with Muhammad Asad when he wrote in his book *Islam at the Crossroads* that the imitation of Western ways of life based on their materialistic, pragmatic, and secular philosophies can only lead to the abandonment of Islam, yet I must take issue with him when he asserts that all of any use to Muslims from the West is confined to the physical sciences.

One of the prime concerns of all Muslim countries is the fight against extreme poverty. Nothing could be more in accord with the spirit of Islam. The Prophet himself said, "He is not of us who eats his fill and lets his neighbour go hungry." For this reason, *Zakat* is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. *Zakat* is simply a progressive income tax collected by the government and used to save those in the community unable to support themselves from destitution. Besides *Zakat*, Islam has other methods of

---

<sup>1</sup>This article constitutes the author's comments on the subject of Islamic Civilization Versus Western Civilization published in "The Islamic Literature" (May-June) 1956.



fighting poverty, such as the Waqf foundations, the inheritance laws, and the prohibition of interest. Yet these are ignored by the majority of Muslim government while the remainder fails to make effective use of them.

In the Muslim world, most charity is given by and to individuals who are entirely unorganized. In the West, because philanthropy is organized, it does far more good. In the Muslim world, the person who gives charity directly to an individual may have even better intentions than the person in the West who gives to the organization, but the organization is more effective. There is nothing to prevent well-to-do Muslims from expressing their piety by creating their own organizations on the model of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. Why cannot the tremendous advances made in Europe and America in the field of social work be used to strengthen *Zakat* and the Waqf foundations into a really effective means alleviating extreme poverty?

A democratic government such as practiced in my country is far more compatible with the spirit of Islam than a hereditary monarchy or a military dictatorship. The spirit of the Orthodox Caliphate was remarkably democratic. Abu Bakr, Uthman, Umar and Ali kept in close contact with the people being accessible to them at all times. They were freely elected deriving their power from the support of the people they governed and from their observance and enforcement of Muslim law. The grave weakness of the Orthodox Caliphate and the reason for its brief duration was the lack of any systematic method for choosing a successor. Although the spirit of democracy was there, the organization was missing. Muslim rulers today could greatly benefit by the study and the adoption of all those aspects of Western democracy compatible with Islam.

However, in so doing, there is one important difference to keep in mind. In a truly Muslim state, the supreme authority is the Shariah and no law can be considered valid if it conflicts with the Qur'an. Western democracy is based on the secular principle that law is an expression of public will and consequently the legislative power of the elected parliament is



legally absolute. In other words, according to Islam, the source of law is divine revelation while Western democracy regards law as a purely man-made product. Both Muslim parties in Indonesia, the Masjumi and the Nahdatul-Ulama have grappled with this problem as must Muslim leaders in the other countries before a solution is found.

No truly Islamic government can be established until a complete revision of the Shariah takes place. The four great orthodox schools of Muslim law, founded between eighth and ninth centuries A.D., were well adapted to the society prevailing then. Unfortunately their successors who closed the door to Ijtihad and practiced Taqlid made the Shariah a fossil.

Although the founders of the orthodox schools of law merit great respect, they cannot be regarded as infallible. Like all human beings they were subject to error.

For example under Hanafi law, a divorce is valid even if pronounced under the influence of intoxicating beverages or drugs. The Qur'an and the Sunnah prohibits all intoxicants. Also according to Hanafi law, the testimony in court of any non-Muslim against a Muslim cannot be accepted because of the hatred the former would feel towards the latter because of difference in religion. Although this factor cannot be lightly dismissed, in cases where it is irrelevant, the non-Muslim would certainly not receive justice in a Muslim court. The Qur'an commands justice and kindness (XVI: 90) while the Prophet said, "God is not merciful to him who is not merciful to men." It is clear that the Prophet meant all men, both Muslims and non-Muslims.

There is nothing in either the Qur'an or the Sunnah which limits the schools of orthodox law to four. If groups of Muslim scholars made a fresh interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunnah in relation to present-day needs, creating a new school of Muslim law and subjecting it to constant revision in keeping pace with changing conditions, the Shariah would regain its health and vitality. To make sure that the new laws were in true accord with the Qur'an and the Sunnah and not a mere concession to prevailing secular ideas, the Ulama of such



universities as Al-Azhar, Zaitouna and Qarawiyin should undertake this task.

The phenomenal pace of technological progress combined with the absence of spiritual values makes an ominous future for the human race. Soviet scientists are now seeking means to find out how to make sleep unnecessary so that industrial production for the state can be enormously increased. They are trying to unlock the mysteries of genetics to make it possible for human heredity to be controlled and changed at will. Such scientists and technicians as these feel absolutely no moral responsibility for the disastrous consequences inevitably resulting from their activities.

The lop-sided development of Western civilization has put human society at the complete mercy of human inventions. In other words, instead of man being the master of science, he has become its slave. It is no wonder that, so completely surrounded by the artificial world technology which has created and denied all contact with a natural environment, people have lost their sense of dependence upon God. All the Prophets and great religious leaders grew to their high stature in the solitude of the desert. It is difficult for me to believe how Moses, Jesus or Muhammad could have been receptive to God's revelation in the rushed atmosphere of a busy business office or as factory workers on an assembly line!

The result is that modern man feels much more submissive to science than to God. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the great Indian reformer, devoted all his energies in an attempt to explain the doctrines of the Qur'an in terms of nineteenth-century scientific thought. All in the former that did not agree with the latter had to be explained away. Thus Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan denied not only the miracles, the existence of angels and Jinns and the virgin birth of Jesus, but also the bodily resurrection, the Day of Judgement and heaven and hell. His god was that of the Deists, so cold, so distant, so rigidly bound to the mechanical laws of nature that he claimed it would be impossible for God to intervene in human affairs and answer prayer. Although Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan wanted to be



considered as observant Muslim, his god was nineteenth-century science and not that of the Qur'an.

Muslim scientists, while studying the technology of the West, must be determined to use it for different purposes to ennoble men's souls and enrich human lives instead of debasing them to the level of brutes or worse still, to robots.

I cannot help but feel that your special May-June issue would have been of far greater value if it had only been discussed in more details, such specific measures to insure Islam's future vitally instead of escaping from the problems of the present by over-glorifying the past.



## Chapter 8

### **An Analysis and a Discussion of *Social Justice in Islam*<sup>1</sup>**

The extremes of wealth and poverty, the widespread disease, the high percentage of illiteracy, the corrupt, irresponsible governments and the many other social evils that afflict the Muslim countries are frequently blamed on Islam. What Dr. Carl Herman Voss, Chairman of the American Christian Palestine Committee, wrote to me in a recent letter, is typical. He said, "A real distinction must be made between medieval Islam's inspiration to Arabic culture in making such a signal contribution to Western civilization during the Middle Ages and the reactionary Islam of today; especially as represented by the fanatical Muslim Brotherhood, which cannot make for progress but only for retrogression."

Sayed Qutb, a young Egyptian Muslim, formerly one of the most prominent leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and now condemned to prison for struggling in the cause of Islam, devotes his entire book to exposing the fallacy of this thinking. He is convinced that these social evils exist not because of Islam but are instead the result of the abandonment of its principles. He writes,

When we see that our social conditions have no possible relationship with justice, we immediately turn our eyes towards the United States or the Soviet Union expecting to import ready-made solutions to our problems. We pay no heed to our rich storage of native spiritual resources. Our faith cannot continue to exist in isolation from society, nor can our society claim to be Muslim if it expels the economic, political, social and religious laws of Islam from its codes and customs until nothing remains but empty ceremonials.

---

<sup>1</sup>Sayed Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam* (translated from Arabic by John B. Hardie), American Council of Learned Societies, Near Eastern Translation Programme No. 1, Washington, DC, 1953.



Sayed Qutb points out that while the teachings of Christianity are confined to individual spiritual salvation and while Communism looks at human needs from a purely economic angle, Islam maintains that the soul cannot be separated from the body and that spiritual needs cannot be separated from material needs. This unity is the most striking characteristic of Islam; a unity which regards all creation as possessing a common origin and a common purpose; a unity which considers man an integral part of this universe dependent upon and related to all other forms of life; and a unity which proclaims the interdependence, the solidarity and the oneness of the entire human race. It is this all-embracing comprehensive philosophy which marks the superiority of Islam over all other religions. Since Islam recognizes no division between theology and social practices, faith and worldly affairs, it cannot, insists Sayed Qutb, be compared with European Christianity.

The author places his greatest emphasis upon the Muslim conception of economic justice, perhaps because he is so keenly aware of the lack of it in his own country. Islam, he says, is unalterably opposed to the extremes of wealth and poverty. It condemns the demoralizing influence of luxury and excessive indulgence. But Islam also disapproves of asceticism because life should be made cheerful and pleasant. According to Islam, says Sayed Qutb, the standard of living should be commensurate with the general wealth of the nation. For example,

When the average American worker can afford an automobile and a television set, it is not luxury that the White House be the home of the President. But when there are million of Egyptians who can scarcely find rags to cover their bodies, it is an impossible luxury that the Kaaba be covered with a ceremonial robe embroidered with gold. And it makes no difference if it is the sacred Kaaba, for it is the public who must provide the money spent in this way.

Sayed Qutb discusses in great detail the social and religious significance of *Zakat*.

*Zakat* purifies the soul from the selfish love of material possessions as well as saving all those in the community unable to earn a decent livelihood from destitution.



Allah has given men a nobility through their minds and emotions and a longing for what is higher than mere physical needs. But when a man had to spend all his waking hours obtaining the mere necessities of life, he is reduced below the level of animals. Even animals generally find their food and drink. Some animals have pride, energy and cheerfulness, some birds can sing, but when man, the noblest creation of Allah, is robbed of the necessities of life, he is also robbed of his dignity, for then he can satisfy neither his spiritual yearnings nor his intellectual capacities.

Sayed Qutb insists, however, that *Zakat* is no cure-all for poverty. At best it can only soothe its symptoms. *Zakat* is most effective, he says, if used for emergency relief to aid the sick, the old, widows, orphans and refugees. The thought immediately comes to my mind that the Muslim countries should use all their resources of *Zakat* to aid the desperate plight of the Palestinian and Algerian refugees.

The only way extreme poverty can be eliminated, he says, is for the government to provide steady work with adequate wages for every able-bodied individual and medical care and education be made available to all. In this way, the nation's natural and human resources could be harnessed most effectively. A system of progressive taxation where each would pay according to his ability would result in a more even distribution of wealth. The seizure of a family's necessities to pay for taxes would be prohibited. Inheritance legislation requiring a man to give all his children and near relatives a share of his property would also discourage the concentration of wealth into the hands of the few. Such an inheritance law that abides by the Qur'an would go far towards the breaking up of huge feudal landed estates, for no longer could vast areas of land pass in their entirety from one generation to the next. In addition to the progressive taxation and inheritance re-legislation would be established by the law of mutual responsibility which would make every community responsible for the welfare of its members. One of the purposes of this law would be the strengthening of the family ties weakened by urbanization and industrialization. Interest on capital in the form of loans, savings in banks or stocks would be forbidden because it is to the advantage of the rich who can increase their wealth without working at the



expense of the poor. Monopolies on the necessities of life would be banned. Last but not least, all varieties of gambling including lotteries and the sale of alcoholic beverages and other intoxicating drugs would be outlawed at once.

Islamic social justice in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah cannot be founded on legislation alone. Its growth and development, insists Sayed Qutb, depends upon a thorough understanding of Islam by the younger generation. A renaissance of Islam, he says, will fail without popular support. For this reason the author vigorously advocates free compulsory education. After a careful examination of the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey, Sayed Qutb gives logical reasons why his ideas have no place in any Muslim school.

The focal point around which Muslim education has always revolved is the Qur'an. This must be as true in the future as it was in the past. However, instead of being satisfied to have children merely commit the Qur'an to memory, mechanically repeating it parrot-fashion, the teacher must not be content until each pupil understands its meaning to the limit of his or her capacity. Moreover the Qur'an must not be taught in isolation from the other subjects but in relation to each of them so that the entire curriculum forms an integrated whole.

We must change our methods of teaching history in our schools and colleges. We must first teach our children the history of their own country then the history of Islam throughout the Muslim world. Only after this thorough study of the history of Islam, should our children be introduced to European and American history written by Western authors. They will then not be influenced by the delusion that all history revolves around Western civilization.

Our schools must also carefully select in their foreign language courses only that European and American literature compatible with Islam. By this I do not mean writings which merely extol goodness or condemn wickedness, for literature is no preacher to exhort or direct. Rather I mean such books that have a view of life which is spiritual and moral rather than materialistic.

The reason for this careful selection of books in schools is to safeguard the impressionable period of adolescence. Meanwhile the adolescent should be encouraged by his teachers to have his



private reading include all types of literature without restraint or exception. This wide range of outside reading greatly benefits the students because it gives them a basis for critical appreciation. They will then have the requisite knowledge to reject all that does not agree with Islam.

Finally the author says that the study of all great schools of Muslim law must occupy a paramount place in the curriculum of the higher institutions of learning and that Western legal systems must not be studied until the very end.

To Sayed Qutb's ideas on education I must add one more point which I feel cannot be exaggerated – that is, the importance of inspiring teaching in all fields of knowledge. It is not enough that students be taught to memorize what is already known. Regimented education can only result in the stagnation and decadent society which has been disastrous to the Muslim world for so many centuries. Higher education must above all encourage students to think – to think independently, critically and creatively within the framework of Islam. If such creative thinking – and I mean truly original and not an imitation Western philosophy – ever arises in Islamic universities, it will lead to another renaissance.

The Muslim world advertises its defeat as soon as it seeks to strengthen its society by borrowing Western laws and Western ways of life. Such experiments can only suffocate the very civilization we are attempting to promote. Instead vigorous application of Ijtihad should make the Shariah flexible enough to keep pace with changing conditions. This does not mean that we should isolate ourselves from modern trends of science for these discoveries are the common possession of all the peoples of the world. Islam does not oppose scientific progress but we must not permit the consequences of technology to alter the fundamentals of the Islamic way of life.

Whether Western technology strengthens or weakens Islam depends on what use these mechanical devices are put, programmes presented on radio or television must elevate the moral and artistic standards of the people instead of being monopolised by entertainment of trivial value and commercial trash as is the case in my own country.

Throughout his book, Sayed Qutb reveals his keen awareness of the difficulties Muslims face in maintaining the



identity of their society under the terrific impact of Western materialism. He writes, "Western civilization has become a danger to the continued existence of man. It breeds in human nature a ceaseless anxiety, a perpetual rivalry, a continuous strife, and a weakening of human ties to the breaking point."

*Social Justice in Islam* raised a storm of controversy among orientalists in America. In the December 1954 issue of *Middle Eastern affairs* Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Director of the Islamic Institute of McGill University, wrote, "Sayed Kotb simply has no conception of what modern social problems are all about." John S. Badeau, professor at the American University in Cairo, wrote in the October 1959 issue of *Foreign Affair*, "Sayed Kotb's defense of the traditional system of Islam merely *reiterates* the theoretical validity of the very ideas which must be eliminated if national development is to take place." In other words, both agree that Islam is "out of date".

Today Islam is rarely attacked on religious grounds. It is instead regarded as a relic of medievalism. To merely drift with the tide and submit to Western secularism is, of course, the easy way-out and this is precisely what the governments of the Muslim countries are doing. Never was the prospect for the fulfilment of social justice in Islam as outlined in Sayed Qutb's book, more remote than it is now.

Sayed Qutb has been condemned because he has had the courage to swim against the tide and remained true to Islam. For this he has not received the credit he deserves.



## *Chapter 9*

### **Muhammad Iqbal The Poet of Islam**

In the midst of the disintegration of Islamic society hastened by Western domination; in the midst of chaos and cultural sterility, the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal remains unique in the history of Muslim literature. In Urdu poetry, only Ghalib can be compared with him. Although Persia nurtured its giants, Jalaluddin Rumi, Saadi, Jami and Hafiz – all Sufi mystics – she has not produced even one major poet for the last 500 years. Turkish poetry has been remarkable for its lack of originality. In the past, it was a pale imitation of the Persian and now it takes its models from the West consequently resulting in nothing of lasting value. Although the Arabs have always cherished poetry above all other arts, it comes as a shock and a surprise to discover how little is pagan; Abul Ala al-Ma'arri was so brazen in his unbelief that he could almost be considered an apostate and there is truly religious. Classical poets such as Imrul Qais were thoroughly-nothing religious in the arrogance of Mutannabi, whose poetry is exclusively devoted to the glorification of his worldly ambitions. Modern Arabic poets such as Ahmad Shafiq, Ibrahim Hafiz, Khalil Matran and Maruf al-Ruafi have confined themselves to secular themes. Of all the major Arabic poets, perhaps only Labib (a contemporary of the Prophet) could be regarded as genuinely Islamic.

The descendant of an aristocratic Brahmin Hindu family who had embraced Islam some three centuries back, Muhammad Iqbal was born in Punjab in 1873 and thoroughly educated in both Muslim and Western cultures. After he graduated from the Government College at Lahore in 1899, he remained a lecturer there for 6 years. From 1905 to 1908, he studied philosophy at Cambridge and Munish also qualifying



for law. After he returned to Lahore, he earned his modest living as a lawyer devoting his spare time to his poetry.

"The Secrets of the Self" and "The Mysteries of Self-lessness" are his two notable works. Although both these philosophical poems were composed more than 70 years ago, their message is as appropriate for today as it was then.

In his "Secrets of the Self" he argues that only by the self affirmation, self-development and self-expression of superior individuals can the Muslims once more become strong and free. All life is individual. God is the most unique individual. The greater a man's distance from God, the less his individuality. He who comes nearest to God possesses the most complete personality. He is not absorbed into God but rather absorbs the attributes of God into himself.

The source of individuality is the formation of ideals and translating them into vigorous action. Here Iqbal condemns passive religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism and decadent.

Negation of desire is death to the living

Even as absence of heat extinguishes the flame.

According to Iqbal, all human achievement is the result of the struggle for self-preservation. What is death, he asks, but to become oblivious to Self?

Oh man of understanding!

Open thine eyes, ears and lips...

War is good if its object is God...

Strength is the twin of truth...

Iqbal considers devotion to the Holy Prophet Muhammad and the urge to follow his example essential to the progress of the individual personality towards perfection:

In the Muslim's heart is the home of Muhammad.

A! our glory is from the name of Muhammad...

His dwelling place is a sanctuary to the Kaaba itself...

The song of love for him fills my silent reed.

A hundred notes throb in my bosom

How shall I tell what devotion he inspires?



A block of dry wood wept at parting from him  
The Muslim's being is where he manifests his  
glory

Many a Sinai springs from the dust on his path

My image was created by his mirror

My dawn rises from the sun of his breast

The Self can be educated only by obedience to the law of  
the Quran and the Sunnah:

Liberty is the fruit of compulsion.

By obedience the man of no worth is made  
worth...

Whoso would master the sun and stars,

Let him make himself a prisoner of Law...

The star moves towards its goal

With head bowed in surrender to a Law...

Drops of water become a sea by the law of  
union,

And grains of sand become a Sahara.

Since Law makes everything strong within...

O thou that art emancipated from the old  
Custom,

Why dost thou neglect this source of strength?

Do not complain of the hardness of the Law

Do not transgress the statutes of Muhammad!

By means of devotion to the Holy Prophet, submission to  
the law of the Quran in its pristine purity and whole-hearted  
practice of the Five Pillars of Islam, the individual personality  
reaches its culmination when it assumes the role of the  
vicegerent of God on earth:

'Tis sweet to be God's vicegerent in the world

And exercise sway over the elements...

He executes the command of Allah in the  
world...

His genius abounds with life and desires to  
manifest itself.

He will bring another world into existence...

He puts the idols out of the sanctuary.



Heart-strings give forth music at his touch,  
 He wakes and sleeps for God alone...  
 He bestows life by his miraculous action,  
 He renovates old ways of life.  
 Splendid visions rise from the print of his foot...  
 His rich substance makes precious all that exists.

However, the individual has no meaning in isolation from society. It is only as a member of a community based firmly on the principles of Islam that the individual can achieve fulfilment of his potentialities. And it is only through an association of superior individuals that society is preserved. The characteristics of a true Islamic society are described in Iqbal's second notable work, "The Mysteries of Selflessness".

The basis of Islamic society is Prophethood:  
 Shrunk is the scope of its crude life,  
 Its narrow thoughts confined,  
 Beneath the rim of its constricting roof  
 Fear for its life the meagre stock in trade  
 Of its constituent elements its heart trembling  
 before the whistle of the wind,  
 Its spirit shies away from arduous toil;  
 Till God discovers a man pure of heart...  
 The naked understanding he adorns  
 With wealth abundant fills its indigence  
 Fans with his skirts its embers,  
 Purifies its gold of every particle of dross.  
 Drawing each on, he circumscribes the feet of  
 all within the circle of one Law,  
 Reschools them in God's wondrous unity  
 And teaches them the habit and the use  
 Of self-surrender to the Will Divine.

The solidarity of the Muslim community is dependent upon a common belief and vigorous propagation of the Oneness of God:

There is One Allah! No other god but Allah!  
 This is the point on which the world  
 concentrically turns.  
 This the conclusion of the world's affairs.



The community requires a visible symbol on which to focus its unity.

The scared Kaaba at once our secret is  
And guardian of our secret, our heart's fire  
And instrument whereupon our passion plays.  
We are a breath nurtured within its breast;  
The body we, and it the precious soul...  
In circumambulation of its shrine  
Our pure Community draws common breath,  
Thou livest by a sanctuary's bond  
And shalt endure, so long as thou shalt go about  
the shrine thereof...

Islamic society is sustained by its submission to the law of the Quran, the urge to follow the example of the Prophet and the preservation of its traditions:

It behoves us all that we beware of Persia's  
fantasies  
Though Persia's thought have the heavens  
surpassed.  
They equally transgress the boundaries set by  
the Prophet's faith...  
To fortify the heart  
Conform thyself with Arab ways to be a Muslim  
true.

Pride in the past Iqbal considers essential if the future is to be faced with confidence:

The record of the past illumines the conscience  
of a people  
Memory of past achievements makes it self-  
aware.  
But if that memory fades and is forgot  
The folk again is lost in nothingness...  
Fix in form bond today with yesterday.  
If thou desireth everlasting life.

The honouring of motherhood is the cornerstone of Islamic society:



Motherboard is a mercy being linked by close  
affinity to Prophethood

He for whose sake Allah said, "Let there be  
life!"

Declared that paradise lies at the feet of mothers  
In the honouring of the womb the life communal  
is alone secured...

Now take the slender figured bosomless, close-  
corseted, a riot in her glance

Her thoughts resplendent with the Western  
light...

Inwardly no woman she!

Her sacred charms are all unloosed and spilled

Bold-eyed her freedom is provocative

And wholly ignorant of modesty

Her learning inadequate to bear the charge of  
motherhood

And on the dusk and evening of her days not one  
star shines.

Better is where this rose had never grown within  
our garden...

Better were her brand washed from the skirt of  
the Community...

The Perfect pattern Fatima the Chaste

Wile her lips chanted the Holy Book she ground  
the homely mill...

Be ever conscious of the model Fatima

So that thy branch may bear a new Hussain,

Our garden blossom with the Golden Age.

The Islamic community is based on common beliefs,  
transcending geographical boundaries, language and race. All  
his life Iqbal remained a passionate foe of modern nationalism  
and here denounces it in the strongest possible terms:

In man's allegiance and constructive work

The country is the darling of their hearts...

Humanity is but a legend

Man became a stranger to his fellow man

Vanished is humankind



There but abide the disunited nations  
Politics dethroned religion  
When this tree first struck root within a Western  
garden,  
The tale of Christianity was call rolled up.  
Jesus' followers spurning the church, debased  
the coinage of the Gospel's Law  
When atheism first rent religion's garment,  
There arrived Sartan's messenger, the Florentine  
(Machiavelli)  
He wrote a scroll for princes  
His evil genius decamped to darkness  
And his sword-like pen struck truth asunder  
Carving images like Azar was his trade  
His novel faith proclaimed the state only  
worshipful  
The touchstone he introduced to test the truth  
was Gain...

Dark night he wrapped about people's eyes.  
Deception called in his vocabulary, expediency!

The freedom of the Muslim community from the bonds of  
geography Iqbal interprets as the true meaning of the Hijra:

Flight is the Law that rules the Muslim's life  
And is the cause of his stability.

Its meaning is to leap from shallowness—

To quite the dew the ocean to subdue...

Be boundless; quest no limit in the world,

He who has burst from all dimensions bonds

Ranges through all directions like the sky.

The Islamic community is eternal as God promised it would  
last until the end of time.

Because our nature is Abraham

And our relation to God the same as that great  
patriarch's,

Out of the fire's depths anew we blossom

Every Nimrod's blaze convert to roses



When the burning brands of Time's great  
 revolution ring our mead,  
 Then spring returns!

Perhaps no other poet in modern times has been subjected to so much misunderstanding as Muhammad Iqbal. Critic after critic has charged that Iqbal derived his ideas directly from the European philosophers, particularly Friedrich Nietzsche. In fact one prominent orientalist Edward G. Browne in his *History of Persian Literature in Modern Times* (pages 431) went so far as to assert that "Iqbal's doctrines are in the main an oriental adaptation of Nietzsche's philosophy".

It is a fact that Iqbal was deeply steeped in modern European philosophies and his emotions tremendously moved by the brilliant pen of Nietzsche. It is no less true that the study of these European philosophers greatly stimulated the growth and development of his own ideas. But it is a gross distortion to depict Iqbal as a mere imitator. That he used his knowledge of Western philosophy creatively taking the best from it while rejecting all that conflicted with Islam cannot be over-emphasized.

For instance, some critics have identified Iqbal's ideal society of superior individual as God's vicegerents on earth Nietzsche's aristocracy of supermen. In his chapter entitled "Muslim Democracy" which he wrote in the *New Era* in 1916, Iqbal sweeps away this misconception.

Nietzsche abhors the democratic rule by the herd of hopeless plebians and bases all higher culture on the cultivation of an aristocracy of Supermen. But is the plebian so absolutely hopeless? The democracy of Islam did not grow out of the extension of economic opportunity; it is a spiritual principle based on the assumption that in every human being is a center for potential power for good, the possibilities of which can be developed by cultivating a certain type of character. From the poorest, simplest, common people Islam has shaped individuals leading the noblest kind of life. Is not then the democracy of Islam a tangible refutation of Nietzsche's ideas?

The degree of misinformation about Muhammad Iqbal can be ascertained from J. S. Badeau's (Professor at the American University of Cairo) claim in his recent book *The Lands*



*Between* that Muhammad Iqbal preached that the Quran was given as a guide only of the period when modern science was unknown. With the creation of modern Western science, the task of intellectual discovery must be done by scientific methods without reference to the authority of the Quran. According to Prof. Badeau, Iqbal taught that the Quran has already fulfilled its function by leading men to the threshold of the modern Western world so science could take up its task from there. Iqbal expresses his true attitude towards modern western science in clear unambiguous language:

Do not seek the glow of love from the  
knowledge of today

Do not seek the nature of truth from this  
infidel's cup

Long have I been running to and from  
Learning the secrets of the New Knowledge  
Its gardeners have put me to the trial  
And have made me intimate with their roses...

Since this garden ceased to enthrall me  
I have nested on the Paradisal tree  
Modern knowledge is the greatest blind  
Idol worshipping, idol selling, idol making  
Shackled in the prison of phenomena  
It is ever engaged in joyless search  
It has not overleaped the limits of the sensible  
It has fallen down in crossing the bridge of life  
It has laid the knife to its own throat...

Nothing could be farther from the truth than to characterize Muhammad Iqbal as a Westernizer as Prof. John S. Badeau has done. Iqbal's deep knowledge of Western materialistic philosophy only served to alert him to the magnitude of its evils. His poetry leaves one without the slightest doubt as to his attitude towards the adoption of Western civilization.

Music of strange lands with Islam's fire blends  
On which the nation's harmony depends  
Empty of concord is the soul of Europe  
Whose civilization to no Mecca bends...



Denied celestial grace a nation goes  
No farther than electricity or steam  
Death to the heart machines stand sovereign  
Engines that crush all sense of human  
kindness...

Reality grown blurred to eyes whose vision  
Servility and parrot ways abridge  
Can Persia or Arabia suck new life from  
Europe's culture  
Itself at the grave's edge.

Of the entire contemporary world of Islam, Muhammad Iqbal is the one and only man who has been able to express in poetry the enduring artistic value what is truly meant to be a Muslim.



## Chapter 10

### Islam and the Modernists

The highly controversial article *What Modern Muslims Think – A Reinterpretation of Islam* by Prof. Asaf A. Fyzee, Vice-Chancellor of Kashmir University, which recently appeared in *The Islamic Review*, deserves the careful attention of all Muslims who value the integrity of the principles of Islam. Although his ideas are expressed with beauty and eloquence and although he cannot be branded an unbeliever so long as he professes belief in the Oneness of God and the Prophethood of Muhammad, nevertheless because he and those who share his thinking are not only mistaken, but also constitute such a serious threat to the survival of the entire Islamic way of life, this article cannot be permitted to remain unchallenged.

In the author's opinion what he calls the central message of Islam is eternally true while the ordinances of the Shariah are out of date. Therefore he claims that religion and law conflict with each other. Because they are incompatible, religion and law must be separated once and for all. He says that Muslims must distinguish between such universal moral ideals as kindness, honesty, loyalty and marital purity which are valid for all times and places and discard such prohibitions peculiar to Islam such as the eating of pork, the drinking of intoxicating beverages, the giving and the receiving of interest, etc., as no longer applicable to today.

But aren't the existing evils of our modern society enough to convince any thinking Muslim that the abandonment of the latter tends to lead to the abandonment of the former? The prohibitions of the Quran are no mere whim to some arbitrary deity. Rather, they eradicate evil at its source.

To Asaf A. Fyzee, one's beliefs are strictly a private affair. However it is an indisputable fact that an individual's behaviour is based on his beliefs. Can the author deny that such actions have an impact on society? He goes on to say that since ethics are surely a matter of individual conscience, attempts to enforce



them by the Shariah are unnecessary. Muslims, he says, should listen to their conscience rather than consult law books. But the individual conscience is no infallible guide. Human beings are not angels. Ethical behaviour without the sanction of and force of law behind it soon degenerates into meaningless platitudes.

Asaf A. Fyzee thinks that Muslim law was suitable only for the Bedouins of seventh-century Arabia. He says that it is impossible to apply the Shariah to the Eskimos, the Australian Bushmen or even the Bengalis of India. Yet American law has been imposed on the Eskimos of Alaska and English law on the Australian Bushmen. That French law now rules the Arabs of North Africa, English law, the Muslims of India, Dutch law, the Muslims of Indonesia and Soviet law the Muslims of Central Asia, Asaf A Fyzee heralds as a great sign of progress. Since Western legal systems have been able so successfully to penetrate alien civilizations of Asia and Africa, why does he think the Shariah any less universal? Evidently he considers the domination of Turkestan by Communist Russia and China as "progress". I wonder if he honestly thinks that the Shariah's conception of justice is inferior to Soviet law.

To Asaf A. Fyzee, the Islamic conception of God being the true sovereign of the world and the law of God being supreme over the whims of human governments and the law of God transcends geographical frontiers is unacceptable because it conflicts with the curse of the modern world. It was responsible for both world wars and now threatens to bring on a third. The supremacy of God has been exchanged for the supremacy of the state. This idea has been pushed to this logical conclusion in Fascist Italy, in Nazi Germany and now more ruthlessly than ever, in Communist China.

Asaf A. Fyzee agrees with the enemies of Islam that the Quran is directly responsible for the degraded position of Muslim women; for the fact that in the Muslim world "women are regarded as the mere playthings of men and seldom as a life companion, co-worker or helpmate". To clinch his argument, he quotes the Quranic verse which says, "Men are in charge of women because God has made one of them to excel the other" (IV:34). But as usual with such attacks he distorts the meaning of the sentence by omitting the vital phrase, "and because they spend of their property for the support of women". Even today



in the most advanced progressive Western countries the husband remains the head of the house because on his shoulders falls the family. Although the working woman's wages may supplement the family income, her responsibility in this respect is still far less than that of her husband.

That men excel women in intellectual and creative attainments is an indisputable fact. Although there have been many fine women artists, writers and musicians, there has never in the entire history of the world been any woman writer to equal Shakespeare, no woman artist on a par with Rembrandt and no woman Mozart or Beethoven. Madame Curie has often been cited as an exception in the scientific field, yet it is doubtful if she could have achieved what she did without her husband. Then too, it must be remembered that God never sent a woman prophet like Abraham, Moses or Jesus.

The Holy Prophet never regarded his wives as mere playthings to gratify sensual lusts as his hostile critics suppose. They were no meek, submissive chattels but strong personalities in their own right and there is every evidence that Muhammad respected each one of them as an individual. The Prophet once said to Ayesha, "God never gave any man a better wife than Khadijah. She believed in me when all the world were unbelievers. She comforted me when all denied my message. She supported me with her wealth when everyone else avoided me and God gave me children through her." Could any man pay his wife a higher of loyalty and devotion than this? Young as she was, Ayesha's alert, brilliant mind made her universally accepted as one of the most trustworthy sources of Hadith.

After the Prophet's death the status of Muslim women rapidly declined when the veil, seclusion and the harem system took root. These customs were all imported from Persia and Byzantium and in the extreme forms they were practiced, they had nothing to do with the Quran. Islam's condemnation of the immodest dress and the unrestricted mingling of the sexes that is so characteristic of modern Western society is intended for the special benefit of the woman not the man as the enemies of Islam would have us to believe.

Despite the invasion of corrupt influences from Persia and Byzantium, the spirit of Islam produced such outstanding



women as that great saint of Basra, Rabia al-Adawiya, the poetess Walladah, the "Sappho of Spain", Shuhdra, a famous professor of Hadith at the University of Baghdad and those two learned sisters, Maryam and Fatimah, who founded Qarawiyyin University. Their achievements were in perfect accord with the Prophet's teachings which considered the search for knowledge as compulsory for women as for men.

There is no need for substituting the attitude of women in the Quran for that of the modern West. If Asaf A. Fyzee would present the Quran in an accurate light, why did he not quote the following verse: "And when We created man, We created woman as his mate that he might find rest and peace with her and We ordained between them love and compassion."

Asaf A. Fyzee claims that he believes the Quran to be the Word of God; he is deeply moved by its beautiful language, yet to him the descriptions of heaven and hell are not reality but mere poetic imagery. Yet the Quran says, "These are no words of a poet! This is the revelation from the Lord of the world!"

Generally speaking, Asaf A. Fyzee accepts the early Makkan Surahs but does not like the Madinan Surahs. The Makkan Surahs reveal the spiritual truths while the Madinan Surahs illustrate their practice. One is meaningless without the other. If the author claims to accept the Quran, he must believe all of it. He cannot pick certain verses out of context that happen to please his fancy and discard the rest.

According to Asaf A. Fyzee, rituals because of their emphasis on outward observance rather than inward reverence retard spiritual development. The beauty of fasting during Ramadhan, he says, can be emphasized without insisting on its hide-bound prescriptions. He says that he believes in prayer but not in the obligation to pray five times daily which he claims has become "a soulless ritual having no meaning left in modern life".

The danger that ritual can become an empty lifeless formality is not, as Asaf A. Fyzee implies, a peculiarity of modern times: It has always existed. It is in recognition of this danger that the Quran says,

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West, but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets and giveth his wealth for love of Him to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy



and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one and the patient in tribulation and adversity and in time of stress. Such as they who are sincere. Such are the God-fearing (II: 177).

In more concise language the Prophet said, "God does not listen to a prayer where the heart does not accompany the body."

In no way can the Quranic verse and the Hadith quoted above be used as a pretext to justify the abandonment of ritual prayers and fasting during Ramadhan. Because faith withers an expression of that faith, beliefs are meaningless without practice.

The purpose of Islamic ritual prayer is for each individual to stop in the midst of his daily activities for the remembrance of God. Once the Muslim abandons his ritual prayers, he naturally becomes so engrossed in the struggle to earn his livelihood that he will tell you he has no time to pray. In other words, making money has become more important for him than the remembrance of God. How can it be denied that the abandonment of ritual prayer has resulted in the deterioration of his faith?

Finally Asaf A. Fyzee wishes to impress his readers with his broadmindedness. Islam, he says, is only one religion, one way of life among many others. He does not assert its superiority over Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism or Buddhism. But I am tempted to ask him, "If you do not regard Islam as better than any other faith, then why are you a Muslim? You might just as well become a member of another religion!"

Yes, he might just as well become a member of a reform Jewish temple for all his arguments for the "liberalizing" and the "modernizing" of Islam are taken directly from the statements of reform Jewish leaders. In fact, he even quotes from the books by reform Jewish rabbis to support his views. True to reform Judaism, he regards the discarding of all law, rituals, customs and ceremonies foreign to Western civilization as essential for the survival of religion. Only by harmonizing Islam with Western civilization as reform Judaism has attempted to do can genuine spiritual life be maintained. But he forgets, as did those rabbis, that modern Western civilization is secular to the core and hostile to all spiritual values.



Does Asaf A. Fyzee really wish his "liberal Islam" to share the same fate as reform Judaism? I happen to have been born a reform Jew. Both my parents were raised as reform Jews. Both received only the scantiest of Jewish training. Consequently neither know Hebrew. Neither are familiar with the Torah or Talmud. They observe no Jewish customs or ceremonies. They know little of Jewish history or culture. It is not surprising that the inside, uninspiring philosophy of reform Judaism is powerless to hold the younger generation. My sister has just joined the Unitarian Church. My parents are not unique among reform Jews. All our reform Jewish friends share the same spiritual vacuum. None has any religion worthy of the name.

I must take issue with Asaf A. Fyzee when he asserts that modern orthodox Islam is spiritually bankrupt. Such brilliant personalities as Muhammad Abd-al-Wahab, founder of the Wahabi movement; Waliullah, whose creativeness as a theologian rivalled al-Ghazzali himself; Muhammad ibn Ali Sanussi, founder of the Sanussi movement; his grandson Sayyid Ahmad, the Grand Sanussi; Jamal-ud-din al-Afghani; Muhammad Abduh and his devoted pupil Rashid Rida, leader of the Salafiya movement and talented editor of *Al-Manar*; Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood; Prince Said Halim Pasha, last Grand Vizier of Turkey and author of that splendid book defending the Shariah *Islamlasbmaq*; and Muhammad Iqbal, poet and philosopher as well as spiritual father of Pakistan – all these great leaders are convincing proof that the vitality of Islam continues to this day. These men had the strength of character and the conviction to preach and practice Islam as the Holy Prophet intended. They knew well that because the spirit of the modern West and Islam are irreconcilable, to compromise with the former means defeat for the latter. For this reason, it is upon the progeny of these men and not those of Asaf A. Fyzee that the future of Islam depends.



## *Chapter 11*

### **Can Islam be Reconciled with the Spirit of the Twentieth Century?**

"Islam shall perish unless it comes to terms with the modern world." Such are the words constantly repeated by the Western-educated ruling class in Muslim countries. They never tire of reminding us that we cannot live in a bygone age. We are taught that it is unrealistic to try to turn the clock back because nothing can reverse the trend of history. Therefore we have no choice except to conform our faith to the demands of an ever-changing secular society. In order to be strong, we are told that we must reject "traditional" interpretations of the Quran and read it "rationally" in the light of modern life. Practically all reforms advocated by the governments of the Muslim countries have this goal in mind. We shall now seek to examine the most important of these and their effect upon the Muslim community.

Because the idea of an Islamic state is an anathema to a world dominated by sheer opportunism, these Western-educated leaders say that we must accept the abolition of the Caliphate as permanent and dismiss any possibility of its revival in the future. Politics and government based on religion are branded as medieval. Therefore, to take their place in the modern world, Muslims must reconcile themselves to secular rule. Towards this end, books have been written in Muslim countries blaming the Caliphate for all the evils afflicting them throughout history. They claim that the Caliphate is not really part of Islam because the Holy Prophet's mission was limited to preaching. He never wished to rule. Only expediency forced him to do so.

Intellectual dishonesty could scarcely sink to lower depths than this. Islam cannot live without an Islamic community and the Islamic community cannot survive without organized institutions and leadership.

The next step after the abolition of the Caliphate is the elimination of the Shariah. Since the Shariah is considered by



many Western-educated leaders as out-moded and its conception of justice inferior to Western legal systems, it is believed that only secular laws can promote the social well-being of society. In other words, it is deemed essential to regard the enforcement of such Quranic laws as the prohibition of lending money at interest, drinking alcoholic beverages, gambling and sex outside marriage as no longer applicable to the present day. The punishments laid down in the Quran for the violation of these laws are attacked as cruel and inhuman. But does an evil not remain an evil regardless of time or place? And is the merit of a law to be judged according to its leniency? Does the criminal deserve more sympathy than society? Without the Shariah, the Islamic way of life disintegrates into a mere collection of empty platitudes.

After the elimination of Islamic leadership and Islamic law, it is no problem to destroy the solidarity of the Ummah. The concept of a universal Islamic brotherhood transcending race, language, and geography is incompatible with the supremacy of national sovereignty. Therefore, to adapt to the spirit of the twentieth century, Muslims are told that the Ummah must be replaced by nationalism.

This has resulted in the isolation and alienation of the different Muslim peoples from each other. Instead of stressing a common Muslim heritage, their leaders glorify a mythical past as if it were a Golden Age Islam snatched away from them. For instance the Turkish nationalists regard the Ottoman period as a time of subjection to foreign culture and foreign languages. Simultaneously Reza Shah changed the name of his country from "Persia" to "Iran" because it was the alleged homeland of the "Aryan" race. The government of the United Arab Republic erects giant statues of Rameses in the public squares of Cairo glorifying him as a great "Arab" king while Umar is depicted by the nationalists not as a pious Caliph but instead the champion of Arab domination over foreign peoples.

On few subjects are the modernists so emphatic than insisting that Pan-Islamism is dead. As one Turk puts it, "We want to construct a Turkish Islam which will be as much ours as Anglicanism is part of England. Anglicanism is not Italian or German. Yet nobody accuses it of not being Christian. Why should we Turks be deprived of an Islam of our own?"



Nationalism is behind the constant clamour for official translations of the Quran without the Arabic text. The adoption of the Latin alphabet by Turkey and Indonesia together with the supremacy of English and the neglect of Arabic in the educational systems of the remaining non-Arab countries have made the language of the Quran increasingly unintelligible. Not only would official translations of the Quran without the Arabic complete the destruction of the Ummah but also inevitably corrupt the text itself.

The overwhelming ambition of governments in the Muslim world is to promote economic development and raise the standard of living through industrialization. One may ask if this is not in accord with Islam's demand for economic justice and the elimination of extreme poverty. In the sense that the Quran denounces asceticism and gives us the right to enjoy our legitimately earned wealth and also in the sense that Allah intended the riches of the universe be used for the benefit of man, Islam cannot be hostile to technological progress as such. But it is implacably opposed to the present-day ideologies which regard no sacrifice too great for material gain or physical power.

It is not the scientific discoveries in themselves which do the harm but rather the materialistic philosophy which forces industrialization to serve destructive ends, bringing havoc to the community, wrecking family ties and religious life. Modern industry will not allow workers to take time off for prayers and the fast of Ramadhan is discouraged as hampering productivity. This same poison has also invaded the schools as purely utilitarian subjects increasingly dominate the curriculum. Thus technical and commercial courses are most highly esteemed while Islamic studies are scorned.

Modern industrialization promotes the philosophy that man can banish poverty, disease and ignorance without divine aid. In other words, science has made man independent of Allah. This is why in the battle against poverty and social injustice, no government is willing to enforce *Zakat*, the prohibition of interest, the Quranic inheritance laws or put the *Waqf* foundations to effective use.

The "emancipation" of Muslim women is regarded by these leaders as indispensable for social progress. If by



"emancipation" is meant the right of women to develop their minds through education and use their abilities to earn their livelihood when necessary, then they are right. But unfortunately the champions of feminism also insist that Muslim women be free to mix socially with men and wear immodest dress. Because Muslim women are required to conceal their bodies in public, there is no question that modern fashions, which are designed for the opposite purpose, violate both the Quran and the Sunnah.

The adoption of Western dress is officially encouraged by nearly every government in the Muslim world. Turkey has gone to the ridiculous extreme of decreeing Western dress compulsory by law. Western clothing has become symbolic of "advancement" and "progress" while the indigenous costume, now confined largely to the very poor in the rural districts, is regarded as synonymous with "backwardness".

To strive for the elimination of all visible signs of Muslim identity by adopting the dress and living habits of a civilization as implicably hostile to Islam as that of the West is tantamount to apostasy. The Prophet made this very clear when He said, "he who imitates the unbelievers is one of them."

Thus we have demonstrated why it is impossible to reconcile Islam with the spirit of the twentieth century. The more Muslim peoples try and "reform" Islam to make it "compatible" with modern life, the weaker they will become. Muslims will gain strength and vigour not by going along with the trend of our age, but only by *fighting against it*. All means, including the mass media, should be employed to arouse among the peoples of the Muslim world sufficient resistance to anti-Islamic laws and policies so that they refuse to co-operate. At the same time increasing support must be given to all qualified leaders willing and able to influence a government under which the Islamic way of life will be officially encouraged instead of discouraged.